



Caroline B. Cooney

THE TIME

TRAVELERS

VOLUME
TWO

TWO NOVELS

For All Time and Prisoner of Time

Praise for *Prisoner of Time*

“The ironic ending is a treasure.” —*Booklist*

Praise for *For All Time*

“Ancient Egypt comes to life in Cooney’s skillful hands, as she seamlessly spins her tale of love and betrayal ... an intriguing story.” —*School Library Journal*

The Time Travelers

Volume Two

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Two Novels

Delacorte Press

Prisoner of Time

ONE



*D*evonny Aurelia Victoria Stratton was smuggling a love letter.

It was not a love letter to Devonny, but that was all right. Devonny was not ready to fall in love with an unsuitable man. It was much more fun to help her friend Flossie who had fallen in love with an unsuitable man.

The folded letter lay inside her glove, hidden by lace and ribbons.

No one must suspect.

If Flossie's father caught the boy who wrote the letter, Mr. Van Stead would throw him into the quarry and smile as he died. This added a certain excitement to every stolen moment.

As for Devonny, her father had been stomping around in a rage lately, throwing things at the servants and beating his horse. He was a heavy man, fond of his whiskey and pipe. Packed into his starched white shirt and closely fitted black jacket, he looked as if bad news would burst him. Devonny would be in trouble if Father discovered her part in Flossie's flirtation.

Devonny intended to fall in love with a man like her father. Well—not mean, dishonest and brutal. Not that part. But like the man who left school in the eighth grade, began by delivering coal, and forty years later was one of America's wealthiest men. Self-made.

Devonny loved that: taking your self and making it. Father had glimpsed Fortune, and then went out and created it.

Devonny, too, would be self-made. A Self-Made Woman. These were new times. And not only that, Devonny had heard about women who had done incredible things. Achievements as important as a man's. Of course she wasn't sure it was true, because she had heard this from a peculiar source—a person who had visited from a future century. Devonny pushed

all those memories from her mind. The end of this century was only a few years away. She could see for herself how life was changing. Why, a woman in New York City was writing articles for a newspaper just as if she were a man! Women were opening settlement houses to help the poor. They were marching to get the vote.

Devonny was not interested in journalism, the poor or votes. She wanted to be a woman of business. Sometimes she could not fall asleep at night for thinking about the business she would create.

But in Devonny's circle, a lady's first concern must always be men. Devonny must constantly plan how to make the lives of men more comfortable. She must be an adornment, so men could be proud of her. Luckily she was very beautiful and had very fair skin. Her father continually reminded Devonny that nothing mattered except her complexion and *his* money.

Soon it would be time to tell Father that he was wrong. Something else mattered. She, Devonny Aurelia Victoria Stratton, was going to make a fortune of her own. She smiled happily, thoroughly enjoying the danger and the pleasure of Flossie's forbidden romance. Love letter crisp against her palm, she strolled onto the veranda, pretending leisure and boredom, so that nobody would guess she was on an urgent mission of love.

There sat her father's houseguest, also writing a letter. The moment Lord Winden saw Devonny, he set blotting paper over his paragraphs and rose to his feet, bowing to her.

Devonny could not help herself. Knowing Lord Winden would approve of a sweet demure smile, she made sure to grin with a rude display of big white teeth. Then, instead of addressing him properly, she said, "Hello, Winnie. Have you been out whipping the world into shape?"

This was intended to offend Lord Winden, who would never bother enough with the world's condition to get out a whip—although he might whip people who called him Winnie instead of Lord Winden.

"Good day, Miss Stratton," he said, smiling. She hated to admit to herself that he had a wonderful smile. "In fine form, as always."

He had not known her always. He had known her only two weeks. He'd attached himself to Father like a son. The only good thing about the man was the hyphen in his first name, Hugh-David. And his authentic title. All

Devonny's friends were mad about British titles. Even her father, usually so sensible, had fallen for this person just because of the title.

Of course everybody adored the English. They were so civilized, and had all those sweet things like coats of arms, and castles, and servants. (Devonny had servants, but American servants were immigrants who got tired of it in a week and moved on. In England, people actually liked to be servants, and even trained their children to do it, too.) The best books were by English writers, the most wonderful ceremonies were for the Queen, and the handsomest soldiers in the brightest of uniforms served the British Empire.

But it was one thing to love Britain; it was quite another to love an actual person. There were three Englishmen staying at the Stratton estate that week, and Devonny found them all boring, stupid and useless. Hugh-David and his friends Gordon and Miles did nothing with their lives. They were like women. They thought mainly of Society: what they would wear, whom they would meet, how the flowers would look on the table. Devonny was embarrassed for them.

"You are covered with dust," observed Lord Winden in his charming British accent. "I cannot think what you have been doing, Miss Stratton." Everything the man said was half accusation, as if he hoped to repair Devonny.

"I was admiring the new fountain, Winnie. Have you seen it yet?" Devonny's mansion had been very stylish a decade ago, but styles change. The new fountain would be as magnificent as Rome.

And just as magnificent as Rome were the Italian workmen. It was warm for October, and the men had taken off their shirts. Devonny was still reeling from the sight of a half dozen men with no shirts on. Of course Lord Winden hadn't seen the fountain; he would never walk where workmen labored. Stone dust and sweat and swearing immigrants were not attractive to him.

They were extremely attractive to Flossie, who had fallen in love with the stone carver's son, Johnny. Flossie was even now huddled behind the lace curtain in the tower room, watching them work. Devonny could hardly wait to get upstairs so she and Flossie could discuss Johnny's bare chest.

Lord Winden, however, wanted to talk.

Devonny felt that people should talk only when she wanted talk, and get out of the way when she wanted them out of the way. Her father said this attitude would not be useful in marriage, but luckily Devonny was barely sixteen, and not considering marriage.

Devonny would fall in love one day like Flossie, and her love, too, would be mad and dangerous and beautiful. But not now. Devonny wanted love, like talk, to come at the exact hour when it would be convenient. Not sooner, and not later.

In the distance, a chestnut mare, ridden by Devonny's stepmother, Florinda, cantered across the meadow. How lovely Florinda was in her black habit, her tall hat, her perfect sidesaddle posture.

Lord Winden's only real interest was horses. Devonny and Lord Winden had gone riding several times, and the advantage was that conversation was limited. Lord Winden's conversation was limited anyhow, so it was a fine arrangement.

"I have not seen the fountain," he conceded. "More attractive than bricklaying, Miss Stratton, would be your father's golf course."

"Do you play golf, Lord Winden?" Devonny thought better of him now that he had a second interest in life.

"Of course. Have you tried it yourself? I have seen ladies on the greens."

Devonny could beat Lord Winden using a tennis racket to hit the golf ball, and she considered explaining this, but decided it was time to practice flirting. If she began now, at sixteen, by the time she came out in two years, she would be excellent, and the young men of Society would swoon in her presence. So she said, "I am sure you are superb." This was a complete lie, but Devonny had observed that this was flirting: lying to men.

She must acquire every skill, because at eighteen, she would be ready for the greatest shopping expedition of all: husband hunting. Since she knew exactly what she wanted, it was just a matter of tracking him down.

"Perhaps this afternoon you and I might enjoy a game of golf," said Lord Winden.

Devonny adored the clothing of golf. Father chose Devonny's wardrobe, and he had forbidden her to wear the new style, which was very plain: long-sleeved white shirt, ankle-length unadorned dark skirt. Devonny

loved this style, which felt so businesslike, and brought closer her dream of being a Self-Made Woman.

But in obedience to her father, she wore a flounced yellow and white striped organza gown, cut low to display a smashing necklace. If she agreed to golf, she could put on white stockings, a white skirt that stopped *above her ankles*, and a white blouse with navy trim. A sailor suit. Such was the power of clothing that in so short a dress, Devonny felt swifter and more able.

“I should be delighted,” she said, wondering if she should thrash him at golf or let him win. “And now, if you will excuse me, sir ...”

They bowed to one another, and she sailed indoors, forcing herself to mount the great stair slowly, and with dignity, rather than taking the steps two at a time to get the love letter to Flossie. Oh, it was all so much fun! She doubted if poor old Lord Winden had ever had any fun in his life. She glided under huge portraits of glaring grandparents. She stepped around the great flowing velvet drapes, which lay on the floor like wine-red snowbanks, and reached the next floor. Then she charged down the hall, threw open the tower door, slammed it behind her, raced up the tower stairs and ripped off her glove to give the note to Flossie.

Inside was not just handwriting. Johnny had included a lock of his beautiful curly black hair. Flossie closed her eyes with joy.

I will feel like that someday, thought Devonny. Bells and stars and fireworks. I, too, will have a keepsake book for the love letters and the curl of hair.

“Do you know how he spells Johnny?” said Flossie dreamily, putting the lock of hair against her lips and kissing it. “G-I-A-N-N-I.” She folded the flimsy paper back over the lock of hair, and closed her fingers as if slipping on a wedding ring. “Devonny,” she whispered, her smile so pure that Flossie seemed nothing but joy, “I am going to marry him.”

Devonny was irked. Johnny was entertainment, nothing more. “Don’t be silly, Flossie. Your parents would never speak to you again.”

“I shall live with him in his house.”

Flossie Van Stead was the fourth daughter in an immensely wealthy family. Her summer cottage was even larger than Devonny’s, her yacht longer and her private rail car more sumptuous.

“The Annellos live in a four-family tenement, Flossie. His mother actually cooks the food they eat.” It was peculiar food, too, a mushy wormlike dish called macaroni; Johnny had brought it in his lunch pail and neither girl had been willing to taste it. “She washes their clothes, Flossie, in a tub, with her own hands. You can’t do that. She shovels the ashes out of the stove!”

Flossie waved this away. “Mama and Papa won’t let that happen. Once we’re married, they’ll give us all the money we need.”

“Married!” cried Devonny. “But this is a game! We’re just playing.”

Flossie lifted Devonny’s hands and clasped them between her own. “No,” she said, as if from a great distance. “No, dear friend. Johnny and I are not playing.”

Devonny shivered at the intensity of Flossie’s soft voice.

“Johnny and I are going to elope.”

But Flossie’s mother and father would not give her all the money she needed. They would not permit her in their house again, nor speak her name, for Johnny was Italian, and Roman Catholic, and poor, and low-class.

Devonny knew well what an angry parent could do. When her own brother, Strat, had disappointed their father, Strat (the only son; the beloved heir) had been locked up in a lunatic asylum. There had been no pity. There had been no discussion.

A failed child was disposed of.

If Strat, so fine and strong and handsome, so bright and capable and affectionate, could be tossed aside like trash into the alley, what would become of Flossie?

“You must help us,” whispered Flossie.

Devonny gasped and moved away, touching the panes of the encircling windows, trying to collect herself. Clouds danced on a brilliant blue sky. The sea shimmered green and foamed white. The woods were scarlet and gold. On such a day, Strat should be here, playing tennis, laughing on the beach, going for a sail.

Whatever had happened to Strat, they would never learn. As the months had gone by without him, hope for Strat had been dashed like seawater on wicked rocks.

They had not found his bones.

Devonny had disobeyed her father many times, but only in small ways: used the telephone without permission; ridden her horse astride like a man; taken off her veil and let the sun beat on her cheeks, risking her greatest asset, her pale complexion. For Flossie to disobey in the matter of a husband—it was unthinkable.

Marry without permission? A Roman Catholic? A laborer? An Italian?

The Van Steads had three other daughters to consider ahead of a foolish one like Flossie, and what was a daughter, anyway, but someone who had not turned out to be a boy? Mr. and Mrs. Van Stead would destroy Flossie as Father had destroyed Strat.

Devonny must prevent this idea of eloping! “Flossie,” she began, “he isn’t our kind.”

“I shall become his kind,” said Flossie. Love glowed on her face. Flossie was willing, Flossie was *eager*, to cut off her life. No more Society, no more travel, no more parents and family and friends, no dresses or dancing or parties. Had she no comprehension of what she would lose?

Flossie pointed out the tower window. The men laying stone along the fountain’s edge had stopped for a break. They wiped sweat from their foreheads. The afternoon sun beat down, turning their skin copper. Johnny was wandering away from his father and uncles and cousins, sauntering toward the long narrow dirt path that led to the holly garden. There he would wait for Flossie.

Devonny loved that path. On one side, a cliff fell straight down to the ocean, and on the other, high shrubs tickled the passerby with delicate branches. Alone on that path she felt like a frontier woman, her rifle at her side to shoot bears that threatened her babies. Soon the men would widen the path, adding stone walls and little stone lookouts, and the frontier feeling would be ruined.

But if Flossie took that path, *she* would be ruined.

Devonny had known somebody once who had been willing to step across a greater border than Flossie would cross: a girl from another time and place, who had come to save Strat when nothing and no one else could do it.

Was it Devonny’s turn now to take a great risk for love, even though it was not her own love? Must she risk all for Flossie? Or should she take the

deep and terrible choice of telling on Flossie? Telling in time to prevent such a dreadful act? Would that be love ... or the terrible betrayal of her most important friendship?

Again she thought of Strat. Annie Lockwood had existed, and Devonny knew that somehow Annie had saved Strat. From this distance, her certainty really did seem lunatic.

And yet ... she believed. She believed that the love of Annie had rescued her brother.

So Devonny said, in honor of love, "Yes, I will help you, Flossie. Go. Catch up to Johnny. I will keep the household busy."

Below, on the spreading porch, Lord Winden uncovered the letter he had been writing to his mother, the Duchess. He paid no attention to green fields and white-capped ocean. He did not notice the gleaming white veranda floors, the robin's egg blue ceilings and the lacy carved balustrades around him. He continued the second paragraph.

Americans make me ill. They are in love with money. The price of this, the stock in that. They actually talk about their work as if it's something to be proud of. No one talks about hunting or horses. They jabber about coal and railroads and hog slaughtering. I would be ashamed to admit that I had anything to do with warehouses.

I know how you feel about Americans, Mama. You are sickened when one duke after another comes home with an American bride.

On the other hand, Mama, those men come home rich. They can now keep the best horses, own a yacht, and enjoy their clubs. I am the fourth son, Mama, and my inheritance is meager. I wish to live well, and that will take money.

It is so easy to impress these people. They love a British accent, and clasp their hands, and beg you to talk more, as if you were an exhibit at a fair. Then they introduce you to their most beautiful young girls.

American girls are loud, pushy, ridiculous—and rich.

I want one who is too young to have become loud and pushy. I want one without a mother, because American mothers are the loudest and pushiest of all.

I have found her.

Her name is Devonny Stratton. Yes—the Stratton railroad fortune.

She is the only child. There was an older brother, but he died in some messy hunting accident. She is the sole heir. Think of the money! She is sixteen, too young to be out in Society, so she knows nothing, which is excellent; you shall train her. Her father (the most uncouth ungentlemanly unattractive American I have met, and that is saying something) loves my titles, accent, clothing and manners.

I shall require that the money comes directly to me. American fathers are touchy about that. As you know, their daughters continue to have control, and problems result. I shall point out how young his daughter is; I must be in charge. So far, he has agreed to everything I have said.

There is no need to cross the ocean for the wedding, Mama.

She is only an American.

As Flossie rushed joyfully down the back stairs, Devonny sailed down the front. She slowed to a ladylike pace and prepared herself to keep the gentlemen occupied, to prevent anybody from catching a glimpse of Flossie.

Out on the porch, Lord Winden had been joined by his two useless companions. Devonny paused in front of the huge hall mirror to inspect herself and be sure she did not look as emotional as she felt. Her hair, on which her maid had spent an hour that morning, was fixed in plump ringlets, which gleamed pleasingly in a ray of afternoon sun.

Gordon's voice came clearly through the open screen door. "I will be glad to return home. In this country, one must be polite to so many unpleasant people."

"There are uses for Americans," said Miles.

"No," said Hugh-David, "one use. Money."

The men laughed.

The tables were piled with afternoon desserts: cakes and creams and lofty pies with whipped meringues. Flowers were everywhere, and so were bees.

Devonny hoped Hugh-David would get stung.

“Just get her pregnant, have a son and be done with her,” came the suggestion.

“I can’t put the girl on the shelf that quickly. I’ll want a second son,” said Hugh-David.

It occurred to Devonny that Flossie would have Johnny’s son. She blushed to be thinking of such a thing, but how were sons created? She and Flossie discussed this often, but had come to no conclusions.

Who decided whether a baby would be a boy or a girl? It must be God. If it were up to the husband, no girl would ever be born.

“And Lisette?” said Miles. “Does she know you’re taking a bride?”

“Of course. Lisette is delighted,” said Hugh-David. “Think of all the Stratton money I can now spend on her.”

Stratton money? thought Devonny. She paused, fingertips resting on the glass doorknob.

“American women are difficult about things like this,” warned Gordon.

“Miss Stratton is a child. She won’t understand,” said Hugh-David. “But you’re quite right, of course. American women are very tedious on the subject of mistresses.”

Devonny might be a child, but now she understood all too well. She stormed out onto the porch. “Who do you think you are, you pitiful excuse for a man?” she shouted at Lord Winden.

Three mouths gaped open in shock above their starched collars.

“You can’t even earn a living!” yelled Devonny. She felt herself getting taller and thinner, literally towering with rage.

The Englishmen got to their feet quickly, because one stood in the presence of a lady, even a screaming, misbehaving lady.

“You haven’t asked me to marry you, Hugh-David Winden, and I wouldn’t marry you if you were the last man on earth! I will marry a man with spunk, and you are horse manure!”

Her father’s study was very dark.

It was filled with oil paintings, the frames so heavy they seemed to drip gold. Carved gargoyles leered out of the woodwork, and unread books sat locked and cold in glass cabinets.

Devonny's father said softly, in his voice of crushed rocks, and crushed lives, "You will marry him, Devonny."

She was weeping. "Father, you can't mean that."

"Devonny, let us consider the situation once more. Your brother went insane. Insanity is in your blood. Nobody would marry you if this became known, least of all an Englishman with a title. The sons you produce might have bad blood, too. I must marry you off before word of your brother's lunacy spreads. I have agreed to this marriage."

"No, Father! I don't love him. I don't think I could ever grow to love him!"

"Love is not a concern," said her father. "I have agreed to the marriage, and I have agreed that it will happen now."

"Now? Father, I haven't even entered Society yet. It's unseemly to arrange a marriage when I am so young. People will think that—that—" Devonny could not speak of the conception of babies with her stepmother, never mind her father. She rallied. "Father, first let me tell you my own plans."

Her father took her chin in his huge hand and turned her face roughly back and forth to remind her that she was an object, which he could position any way he chose. Her tears ran down his thick fingers. "I have told you what the plans are, daughter."

His vest was sprung tight over his spreading flesh. Pipe smoke surrounded him in a choking cloud.

"Father," she said desperately. It was difficult to speak with her jaw caught in his grip, difficult to think as her eyes were being flung from one direction to the other. "I have been considering telephones. Only five years ago, we had never utilized such a machine. Now, in New York City, there are tens of thousands of instruments. Father, I believe the future of America lies not in railroads, not in ocean shipping, but in telephones!"

He let go of her with a sort of thrust, half jamming her jaw back into the throat. Devonny kept on. "Sir, I wish to begin telephone service to—"

"Your purpose," said her father in a voice of iron, the iron in which he had made his fortune, "is to become an obedient wife. You will not shame

me again in front of my guests. I have not permitted you to acquire blemishes on your complexion and I will not permit you to acquire blemishes in your behavior.”

The rage was in his hands, the hands becoming fists. Devonny must calm him down, make a friend of him again. “Father, how can you have respect for Hugh-David when he isn’t capable of running a business? He can ride a horse, visit his club and use a tennis racket. Why are you not contemptuous of him?”

“He’s an Englishman,” said her father. “One doesn’t expect accomplishments from them. But you’ll have a title, and your son—*my grandson*—will sit in Parliament.” Her father laughed. It was a thick cruel chuckle. “In fact, at the rate these penniless dukes are snapping up American brides, many sons of America will sit in Parliament. American grandsons will rule England.” With his heavy drooping mustache and grizzled beard, he looked like an ancient ape. “A half-breed, the English will call your son. They have no use for Americans; they might as well be marrying a savage. But how they love our money. And you, my dear, come with a large supply.”

Well, she was not going to marry Hugh-David, who had a mistress and scorned Americans! It was out of the question! Why, Flossie marrying Johnny was better off!

But her father was dreaming of grandsons. To supply them, she must wed somebody else. “I could marry Randal,” she offered.

Her father snorted. “That simpleton?” He handed Devonny an envelope. Devonny opened the letter slowly, understanding that Randal, whose silence had hurt, had written to her after all. Father had chosen to keep Devonny’s mail.

My dearest Devonny,

Thank you for so many lovely visits while we were in California. Of course I had hoped to see more of you, but it is not to be. I congratulate you on your upcoming marriage. Perhaps our paths will cross while you are on your wedding trip in Europe.

*Ever your respectful friend,
Randal Porter, Esq.*

Devonny tore the letter in half and carefully fed the halves to the fire, to prevent herself from saving the letter and weeping over it. “Father,” she said, for she knew this parent well, “did you pay him?”

Father picked up his pipe and chewed slowly on the end of it. Devonny envied him. Smoking a pipe gave a gentleman so much to do—filling, tamping, lighting, puffing—while she could only stand quietly, awaiting his pleasure. At least she had control over her tears now. Her neck hurt from being wrenched back and forth, but she would not massage the ache lest her father take satisfaction from it.

“Devonny, I have groomed you to be a good wife. Now,” he said, “your breeding must show.”

He purposely used words meant for horses. Groomed. Breeding.

I am nothing, she thought, but breeding stock. “Father, I know you care about my happiness.” She did not know this. Father had never shown a particle of interest in her happiness.

“Your happiness consists of pleasing me.”

“But Father—”

“Do not begin another sentence with the word but.” He advanced, and she knew the slap was coming, but held still, hoping he would recall that complexions were everything; a bruise on her face would not be attractive.

They stared at each other.

She could only hope that Lord Winden would be so humiliated by her shrieking in front of his friends that he was already packing, off to find a bride with better manners.

Her father lifted the leather rectangle that lay on his massive desk. Into its triangular corners, a new blotter was fitted every morning. Flat and hidden underneath lay a single piece of ivory paper with rippled edges.

“Read it,” he said. Fury mottled his speech. So this piece of paper was the source of his recent rage. It could not be a letter from Johnny Anello; he wrote on cheap lined school pads. It could not be from Flossie; she used Devonny’s onionskin paper.

Devonny was afraid to reach for it, lest her father stab her hand with the letter opener and pin her to the desk. What could be on that page, to turn her father into a beast?

The writing was copperplate, that slender elegant script used by educated people. Spidery letters wove delicately over the page.

Your only son died insane, Mr. Stratton. Your daughter carries the blood of insanity. Devonny may receive offers of marriage ... but if I produce papers you signed, committing your son to the Evergreen Asylum for the Insane, your daughter will die a spinster. No grandson for you. No next generation to inherit the fortune you created. Unless, of course, you wish to purchase that paper from me ... and if so, you must act quickly, for there are other interested parties.

Devonny was gasping for air. *Blackmail*. The corset that reduced her twenty-three-inch waist to eighteen inches allowed no room for frightened lungs. *To die a spinster*. Devonny could think of no worse prison.

“The writer of this letter,” said her father, measuring his syllables to keep the rage from corrupting them, “has chosen a good year. There is nothing happening in New York City. Newspaper readers are bored by descriptions of children in tenements and senators taking graft. Insanity in my family would delight reporters. It would destroy my chances of marrying you off at all, let alone having you marry well.”

Devonny examined the letter for clues, turning it over, and over again, as if she would find a signature, or an address, or a clue. “Do you know who wrote the letter, Father?”

“If I knew, he would be at the bottom of the ocean,” said her father. “But I shall find out. No one threatens me.”

It was true. Father had smashed unions rather than raise pay or cut hours. He had closed a plant, losing huge sums of money, rather than acknowledge the union trying to form there. When renters of his tenements were late with payments, they were removed by force, even if the woman was in labor or the husband dying. As for how Father had treated Mother, had treated Strat—these hardly bore thinking of.

But for once, Devonny was glad for her father’s roughness. *Blackmail!* Yes, that person must be destroyed! And who better than Father to crush someone?

“It is imperative to get you wed, on a ship out of the country, and with child. Lord Winden is in a hurry to be rich, and I am in a hurry to get you married. It is a good match. We will have your wedding within the month.”

Devonny nearly fainted. She had dreamed of her wedding day all her life. Nobody could put together a wedding in a month! A month wasn’t

time to arrange bridesmaids, have bridal teas, and—

“We will borrow a wedding gown,” said her father, “and put my New York staff to work on the reception.”

Borrow a wedding gown?

Devonny wanted to scream or weep. At least, if she must be married off like this, the wedding gown should be her choice! It should be designed just for her, they should send to Paris for it, she ought to have ...

But whatever she ought to have, she would not.

She, Devonny Aurelia Victoria Stratton, would reach not a single one of her dreams. Instead, she would have an unwanted marriage, years too early. A man who despised her family. A life in a foreign land among foreign people.

Her father slipped the letter carefully into its hiding place. Devonny was amused. The servants who changed that blotter and polished that desk had probably memorized the contents and told the entire household. There were few secrets in a mansion run by servants. How amazing that her father, who knew everything, did not know this.

“You will go now,” said her father, “and apologize to your future husband. Explain that you behaved badly, but it is merely youth. You have much to learn, and you hope he will be kind enough to forgive you. You hope for his thoughtful control over your person, so that you will behave better in the future.”

“Father,” she said, groping for a strategy to combat this, or at least stall it.

“Or,” said her father, leaning so close to Devonny that the bristly edges of his beard scraped her cheek, “I will tell Hugh-David myself. Her brother is insane, I will explain. I cannot permit her to contaminate this world with insane children, I will tell him.” Her father expelled a lungful of cigar smoke into her eyes.

“The wedding, I will announce, is off.”

Devonny pressed her hands to her eyes.

“You will then choose a bedroom, Devonny, and in that room you will spend the remainder of your days.”

Hiram Stratton’s past was strewn with the ruined lives of people who had offended him. Hiram Stratton did not joke and Hiram Stratton did not exaggerate.

So Devonny went to Lord Winden, pale and trembling, as a woman should be.

He was kind, however, and said that he understood. She had been shocked, he agreed, and ladies did not manage surprises well. Their weak systems could not tolerate confusion. Devonny was not to feel shame. He would make all decisions in the future. She was to stay out of the sun and keep her lovely complexion, because such fair skin would please his mother, the Duchess.

“Thank you for your greatness of heart, sir,” said Devonny, who would rather have put a knife through him, and he said, “Good girl,” and they went together to her father, to ask his blessing on their marriage.

“First,” said Lord Winden, using his cute little accent, playing with his cute little mustache, “we shall discuss the contract.”

Devonny was sent away. The men would handle her life and fortune without her.

And so it was, on a beautiful windy day in October 1898, that Devonny Aurelia Victoria Stratton went alone to a remote corner of the Stratton estate, where she knelt and begged for rescue, as if she really thought a gracious God or a knight in shining armor might come for her.

TWO



Of course a man making his fortune could not be expected to show up for his junior year in high school. Tod Lockwood was disgusted when his parents, principal, teachers and even neighbors did expect just that.

“In the olden days,” Tod explained crossly, “a boy quit school in the eighth grade and went out and made his fortune.”

“How olden are you getting?” his father asked. “That’s more olden than I ever was. You’re going back a century.”

Tod felt there had been many possibilities to the nineteenth century. Men were men. Fortunes were waiting to be made in railroads and shipping and automobiles.

Tod had to live in an era of computer keyboards. Tod got bored sitting still that long. He did not want to spend his life typing.

Luckily, he had a truly brilliant idea: designer water.

People were thrilled by water in bottles. Tod couldn’t figure out what they saw in those bottles, other than water, but they sure did, and they sure paid for it. How many businesses were there where all you needed up front were some bottles and your own faucet?

Of course Tod’s Kitchen Tap Water probably wouldn’t sell. So he was taking the water from the spring at Stratton Point, an old waterfront estate that was now the town beach. Over the spring was the original pump, with a curved red handle, which had to be pumped several times to get the pressure up. Then Tod had to lug all those gallons of water away. How many times did a person want to hang around the picnic grounds pumping water by hand?

Once.

So Tod was diluting the water from the spring at Stratton Point with his kitchen tap water, and it tasted just fine.

An artsy friend designed a label for his bottles: pine trees (Stratton Point didn't have any), a romantic mansion (the Stratton mansion had been torn down), and a sweet tumbling brook (the water came out of a rusty pump). According to business magazines, red was a selling color, right up there with cobalt blue. He was going with red. He obtained several thousand eight-ounce plastic bottles and spent happy hours sticking labels on them.

The designer water business gave Tod plenty to think about when he was home. His parents had gotten back together, so thoroughly that they were having a second honeymoon right there in the house. They were so mushy Tod had to spend all his time with his face averted.

Sure, Tod was glad the family was back together and all that stuff, but he wished they weren't *this* together. It was embarrassing. Tod wished he lived in a time when men led their lives and women led theirs, and nobody had to pay attention, or make an effort, or compromise.

He used to have an ally of sorts: his sister, Annie. Annie and Tod had never gotten along well, but they got along somewhat, in certain circumstances. But Annie had a chance to spend a semester abroad and was in Norway, while he was bottling water and watching his parents smooch.

Then the water didn't sell.

It turned out there was a lot of competition in the bottled water business. This was discouraging for an afternoon, and then Tod realized that he had to do some serious marketing. The first thing to do was to increase demand for water. People had to drink more of it.

He was going to hire pretty girls in tights and spangles to sell his water at the high school, but the principal said this was sexist—plus school was not about sales, it was about knowledge.

Then he decided to convince people that cafeteria liquids (milk, soda, iced tea) were defective, and gave you disease, and you'd better buy Stratton Point Spring Water. The cafeteria ladies threatened to beat him up.

Okay, fine. If people wouldn't drink it, they'd wash in it. He'd sell it in the chemistry and biology labs. "Your hands are safer from acids and frog

blood if bathed in Stratton Point Spring Water.”

It turned out that people who were willing to pay almost two dollars to drink water were not willing to pay to wash their hands in it. Tod tried to point out how stupid this was, but the class told him to get lost, and take his water with him.

Well, there were always tourists.

Tod went downtown among the leaf peepers—in October, New England was full of tourists from the rest of the United States, Europe and Japan—and hawked his water. At last! Success! Foreigners who did not know much about water in the United States were delighted with this souvenir. Tod’s former scoutmaster, a man who lived up to being clean, strong, honest and true, said if Tod didn’t give back the right change, he was a dead ex-Scout. This cut Tod’s income, but still, he sold every bottle in one weekend.

So Tod went down to Stratton Point to get more spring water, because what with scoutmasters on his case, he had to have at least a drop or two of the real thing in each bottle.

Tod was not thinking of love.

Tod did not have a whole lot of use for love, being more interested in money. Besides, love involved girls, and Tod was not that drawn to girls. They giggled; they resembled his sister and mother, who were extremely difficult human beings to understand. Tod figured when he was thirty and a millionaire, established in the world and driving several cars, maybe racing them, there would be time for love. No need to rush it.

Carefully arranging her enormous skirts to prevent grass stains, Devonny Stratton went down on her knees and prayed for rescue. All brides forced into weddings pray for rescue. But there could be none, for only a man could rescue a woman, and the man in Devonny’s life had arranged the marriage.

Far across the meadows, the three towers of the Mansion glinted in the sun. Between Devonny and that imposing silhouette were hundreds of elm, chestnut, maple and oak trees, brilliant October blurs of scarlet, gold and yellow. What a contrast was the dark cold green of the holly garden where Flossie and Johnny had dared snatch a moment.

By now, Flossie would be back at the house, probably agreeing to golf with Gordon or Miles. Her flushed cheeks and pounding heart would not betray her, for Gordon and Miles were so proud that each man would think himself responsible.

Devonny too must return to the house with nothing in manner or speech that could betray her. Fury and fear alternated in her heart. Fear won.

The next few years should have been such fun! Her girlfriends and Strat's buddies from college—laughing, rowing across the little lake, having clambakes, dancing in the ballroom, acting out plays, and laughing again.

And it was not to be.

"Mama," she said brokenly, though she hardly knew her mother. The two children had been kept by Father when he divorced and began his string of remarriages. Mama lived in poverty, with barely enough to keep warm in winter, never mind stay in fashion, and give parties for friends.

Devonny thought bleakly of her mother's awful dark little house in Brooklyn, only one room heated in winter; only one servant to help. How could Flossie possibly find romance in poverty?

In all these years, Mama had found no way around poverty, and if she could not help herself, she certainly could not help Devonny. Mama had not been able to help Strat either, though she had tried.

Father was lying to Lord Winden about Strat's end, claiming that Strat died in a hunting accident in the mountains. But they did not know that. Strat had vanished. That was all they knew.

Devonny herself had given an order to Annie Lockwood: If you have no other way to save Strat, bring him with you into your own century.

It was such a strange thought: that Strat might be out there—breathing, running, laughing, reading the paper—but not for a hundred years.

What if Strat came back?

The question of money would also come back. If Father's only son returned, it would be much less likely that Devonny would inherit everything. And much less likely that Lord Winden would want Devonny. In fact, Lord Winden would *not* want Devonny!

As for Father's threat ... forbidden to marry; a useless dried-up old spinster kept in a separate room ... if I could get Strat home, thought Devonny, I could prove he is no lunatic. Then there could be no blackmail!

And Strat would take care of me. He's a man now, and would overrule Father. I would not be thrown into a marriage like a ball into a game! I could marry for love.

I must bring Strat home.

Devonny straightened the long glimmering yellow skirt. She retied the lovely sash. She touched the cameo at her throat. She felt the freshness of the flowers on her hat.

How had they done it?

How had they stepped through?

What magic word, or place, or thought, or need had ripped her brother and Annie Lockwood through a century?

"Strat!" she cried. "Strat! I need you!"

But nothing happened.

Devonny stomped her small foot, but her soft leather sole made hardly a sound in the high grass. She did not even have the power to make noise.

There was no Annie Lockwood. There was no Strat. In fact, what her father had told Lord Winden was probably the truth: that Strat was dead in the mountains.

"Somebody help me," said Devonny tonelessly. She did not raise her voice. "Somebody think of something to do," she said, not loud enough to make a swallow change flight.

She shaded her eyes to see the nearest village on the shore. Was Strat there? Just a few miles away—and a hundred years?

If she stepped through, as somehow they had stepped through, could she find him? Would he be waiting for her? Would he even know her?

Devonny clasped her hands and held them before her. She addressed Time, which held Strat: *I need him*, she said, *take me to him. I have no power. Only my brother can save me.*

Tod put his mouth to the spigot and drank several cooling gulps. He never worried about stuff like germs or dirt. When he got a mouthful of rust, he just swallowed it. Tod never got sick. It was a matter of choice. You wanted to stay well, you informed your body, and it obeyed you.

Within seconds, Tod was hideously sick.

His head was coming off. His whole body was being wrenched apart.

Tod had never even had the flu. He could not imagine what was happening. He wanted to throw up, or grab on to something, or scream, but there was no Time.

Time, he thought; and somehow, grotesquely, *he could touch time*.

Time, which was invisible, like love or power, pressed up against him, and scraped his skin, and tried to break his bones.

Tod tried to brush it off himself, as if he'd walked into spiderwebs, but he had no control over his hands, and then his hair peeled away as if he were being scalped.

There was so much Time.

Years and decades of Time, fat swollen hours of Time, like disease. The sickness lasted a century, and yet used up no Time at all.

Then came the after-feeling of sickness: a thin brain and a weak belly. Tod found himself still gripping the red-handled pump, still kneeling on the soggy grass.

He tried to breathe deeply but his body was unwilling. He panted in a shallow fashion and forced his hand to relax on the pump handle. A drop of water lay neatly on the rim of the spigot. It grew larger, and fell. The paint was not peeling. The red was shiny, as if painted that morning. There was no rust around the iron rim. In fact, beautiful brass trim covered the place where Tod had just put his lips.

What if the water's poisonous? he thought. Oh, that'll be great. I can't wait to announce that downtown. You know those tourists who overpaid for my bottled water? Well, get the hospital beds ready....

Using the pump for support, Tod stumbled to his feet. He felt disoriented, or else carsick.

A girl was standing there. He didn't remember running into anybody else at Stratton Point.

But this was not anybody.

She wore an enormous dress, yellow satiny stuff cascading all around her. She had really strange shoes on—but then, Tod's mother often wore shoes that a normal human would never shove over his toes. She had on an amazing necklace—but then, Tod's sister wore necklaces made of anything from crystals to plastic bear claws. This girl's hair, however, was in a class by itself. Long separate cylinders jostled for space on her shoulders and delicate tiny wisps lay sweetly on her cheeks and forehead.

I'm in the middle of a photo shoot, he thought.

The girl was staring at him with an incredulous expression, and now she was extending her hands, slow motion, as if she wanted to dance. "Yeah. Hi," he said nervously. "How are ya? I'm outta here, sorry I interrupted." He looked around to see the camera crew and retrieve the water carrier.

No camera crew. No water carrier.

No picnic ground. No parking lot. No car.

In fact, no road.

The sickness rolled over him again, and he focused once more on the girl. She was very pretty, although Tod tried not to judge these things; it just got him interested in the girl, and he was not ready to allocate time to girls. She was laughing, she was coming toward him, it was some creepy joke, it was—

She hugged him.

Tod had never had a girlfriend. Never been hugged by any female person except a relative, and then usually under orders. She was amazingly soft. She was definitely and completely not a boy.

She was laughing with delight. "Who are you?" She released him. "I'm Devonny. Have you come for me? Is Strat with you? How did you do it? I am so happy to see you! How are you going to save me?"

"What?" said Tod, feeling that his life had just come apart in some essential way. "I'm Tod Lockwood," he said, because he was still sure of that.

"Annie's brother!" she cried, clapping her hands.

She was wearing gloves. Tod had never seen anything so strange in his life. The gloves were lace and her real fingertips stuck out. Around her wrists the lace was gathered with living flowers, a sort of rose bracelet. The lace muffled her clap, giving it a strange, indoor sound.

"Annie sent you," she said joyfully.

Tod felt marginally better. It was not surprising that his sister, who was nuts, would have friends who were nuts and dressed crazy. "Nope, Annie's still in Norway," he said. "This is my own business. I sell bottled water."

A lace hand flew to her mouth and an expression of horror crossed the girl's face. "What do you mean, Annie's in Norway?"

"Well, you know, she got accepted in a student exchange, and she'll be in Scandinavia for six months. Then we take an exchange student in our

house. She'll be back in February."

"She sent you instead, then," said the girl, and her smile became peaceful. "I," said the girl, "am Devonny Stratton."

"Cool. I didn't know there were any Strattons left," he said. He kind of liked the name Devonny. "Town's owned the place for fifty years."

"What place?" she said.

Yes, undoubtedly a friend of Annie's. They were nothing but computer errors, Annie's friends. Or viruses, depending on his mood.

That had been some drink of water.

Tod knew every inch of Stratton Point, all two hundred acres. Like every kid in town, he loved the Point. The beaches were best, but everything from holly garden to bell tower was his, by exploration and childhood. All those neat places where the Stratton family had had fountains, lookouts and stables all those years ago.

And yet, Tod did not know where he was standing. The sick feeling swirled through his head. His thoughts fogged up like a windshield. He, who knew every square foot of Stratton Point, could recognize nothing. Where was the road? Where was the car?

"I did not even know about you, Mr. Lockwood," said Devonny Stratton. "Your sister never mentioned you."

Mr. Lockwood? "I don't mention her either, if I can help it," said Tod.

"Is Strat living with you?" said the girl anxiously. "Did Annie bring Strat home with her?"

"We only have one pet right now," said Tod. "A collie named Cotton. Listen, I'm feeling a little strange. Like, where are we, exactly?"

There was a long silence.

Tod had never known such silence. Not just the girl refusing to speak—*but the world*. No cars, no engines, no planes, no radios ... He turned in a long, slow, full circle. There, on the Great Hill, stood the Mansion. Not the crumbling hulk the town had demolished last year. But a magnificent glittering three-towered—

—*new* building.

The peeled sensation came back, as if his brain tissue had been left open to the air.

"You have come to me," said Devonny Stratton slowly, "in my Time. The year is 1898," she said, "and you are on my estate."

“Get out of town,” said Tod.

But memory was thick and suffocating in his brain. One time his sister had gone missing. Family and friends, and later police, had searched for Annie; searched every corner of this very beach and park, where she had last been seen. There had been no trace of her.

When she had showed up—*two days later!*—his parents had allowed her to get away with the flimsiest excuse: “I fell asleep on the sand,” Annie had said.

Had Annie, too, pressed her mouth to this pump?

A muffled clippy rhythmic sound interrupted the silence. Through a meadow of asters and high grass came a woman on horseback. The woman was wearing a skirt, long and black, and rode sidesaddle.

Eighteen ninety-eight, thought Tod. He was furious and scared and having a little trouble breathing. No wonder Annie had not been able to think of a good excuse for being away a few days. “I bet my sister loved this, huh, Devonny? She’s just the type.” Tod was not the type.

“She fell in love,” said Devonny, “with my brother, Strat. She came back a final time to rescue Strat from a terrible fate.”

Maybe if Tod sort of skidded along the surface here, pretended this was virtual reality, he could flick a switch and be done.

“You must take me with you,” said the girl. “My brother must be with you. Annie must have brought him home. I need him. He must save me.”

“No,” said Tod. “She hasn’t dated anybody this year. She sure hasn’t brought anybody home. I don’t even know anybody named Strat.”

The girl began to cry.

Tod hated that; it was a crummy trick. “Don’t do that,” he snapped. “What does Strat need to save you from? Don’t even think about crying. Just give me facts.”

“Marriage,” she said. “My father has chosen a dreadful man for me to marry. A man with—well, evil personal habits. A man who wants only my money.”

“So?” said Tod. “Just don’t marry the guy. Just say no.”

She looked at him.

“It’s a big slogan in my day, Devonny. If somebody offers you drugs or sex or crime, you just say no.”

“I am not in a position to say no to my father,” said the girl.

“Sure you are. It’s America. Just say no.”

“But I am a girl.”

He was irritated. “Big deal. You’re half the population. Say yes, say no, make up your mind, I don’t see what your father has to do with it.”

“It would not work. There are complexities. There is blackmail, and there are fortunes, and you are being as annoying as your sister. I need my brother, and I know you have him! Now take me home with you!”

Take you home with me? thought Tod. Yeah, right. Like I’m gonna walk in the door to my house with a teenage girl in a long yellow prom dress and tell my mother we’re saving her from a bad marriage.

Tod aimed for control over his blood and bone and brain tissue. Keeping himself unreachable, so he could just slide home, like a baseball player, he said, “Devonny, I can’t take you home. And I don’t think Annie brought your brother home. Unless he’s invisible. And even then, I don’t think she’d go off to Norway if she had some cute guy around.” He stepped backward, hoping to be on a parking lot again, with his car behind him.

Didn’t happen.

“Even now my father and Lord Winden are drawing up a contract to dispose of my assets, Mr. Lockwood. I will be forced into a wedding in only a month.”

“What do you mean, dispose of your assets?”

“The opening settlement will be two million dollars for Lord Winden.”

“Wow. That should be enough to go around. Tell your father you want it. What could he do?”

“Mr. Lockwood, you are not listening! He can do anything he wishes. I can do nothing. I need Strat.”

“What could Strat do that you can’t?”

“He’s a boy.”

“You better not let my mother hear you talk like that, Dev,” said Tod. “She’d string you up. She hates when women have a poor self-image.”

“I would love to hear your mother’s advice,” said Devonny. To his absolute horror, she knelt before him and clung to his hands. Her rose bracelet brushed his wrist. He could not bear the sight of her on her knees.

“Take me back with you,” she cried, “and together we’ll find Strat. Then Strat and I will return to our Time and he will solve the nightmare in which I am caught.”

Tod felt cornered out here in a meadow with nothing in sight but grass and flowers.

“I’d stay in one of your guest rooms,” pleaded Devonny. “One of your extra maids could wait on me. You wouldn’t even have to seat me at your dining table. The footman could serve me in my room. Mr. Lockwood, I do beg of you.”

“Dude,” said Tod. He blinked a few times. “Listen, Dev, if you have all this money, you don’t need anybody to bail you out. Just get your own house, buy your own car, pay your own insurance, and hey—you’re set.”

“Oh, this is just like talking to your sister! Annie was so difficult, Mr. Lockwood. Your sister was obstructive and annoying.”

“It’s good we agree on something. Now you gotta call me Tod.”

She shook her head, which caused the long exotic curls to shake, and he wanted to run his finger up inside the cylinders of hair, and then he felt sick all over again, but it was not seasick, or carsick, it was some other sick entirely.

“We haven’t been introduced,” she said primly.

He yanked her to her feet. “Tod, Devonny. Devonny, Tod. There. We’ve been introduced. But even introduced, Dev, it wouldn’t work. I mean, like, my mom has better things to do. It would all be on me, and I personally don’t even like taking the dog for a walk.”

“Please, Mr. Lockwood. I must find my brother. He is my only hope!”

“Listen, Devonny, he isn’t there. As for me, I’ve started a new business and I’ve just figured out how to make money at it. I have customers now, and things to do. Bank accounts to open.”

“That’s wonderful!” cried Devonny. “I love men like that.” She looked at him worshipfully. Never had a girl gazed at him like that. It wasn’t too bad.

“I shall join you as soon as I pack my trunk,” Devonny said breathlessly. “I know this is why Time brought you to me, Mr. Lockwood.”

Tod tried to imagine Devonny in the school cafeteria. In an age of unruly hair, hers was a work of art. In an age of dirty heavy sneakers, she wore white slippers. In an age of torn jeans and obscene T-shirts, she carried a parasol. “What would we tell people? Especially my parents. Dev, you don’t wanna marry the guy, don’t marry the guy.”

“It isn’t that simple,” protested Devonny, crying again. Tod figured now her mascara would run and her makeup would look crummy, but then he realized that she wasn’t wearing makeup. He liked her for that. The whole face correction idea seemed pathetic and ridiculous to Tod. When the girls in school covered themselves with makeup, or when his mother and sister did, he made a point of gagging in front of them.

“I’m gonna leave now,” said Tod. Assuming I can, he thought. What if Time decides?

Tod was against that. A person should have complete control over his life. Well, I do, he told himself. I can do anything my sister can do, and she made it back and forth.

“I thought you would be a knight in shining armor,” said Devonny. She did not touch her tears, but let them lie on her cheek and throat. “I thought you would save me. Why did you come if you weren’t going to save me?”

“It isn’t like I meant to come,” said Tod.

She looked stricken. As if he had slapped her. Fleetinglly, Tod considered what his mother would do to him were he ever to raise a hand to a girl.

He didn’t want any heavy thoughts here, or any responsibility. People had to be responsible for themselves. “You don’t need saving, Devonny. You just need guts.” Tod had no sympathy for weakness. “I’m going,” he told her.

She held out her hands, and the flowery bracelet fell from one wrist, and her voice trembled on, saying more, but he stepped back, grabbed the pump handle, closed his eyes—and it worked. Her words followed, crying without sound, *But I need you!*

The pain was worse this time. His vision and hearing and touch were torn apart and savaged. It went on and on, beyond counting, beyond belief. Through it all came the distorted syllables, jumbled and wrecked; *But I need you!*

It was not going to end. He had refused help to a person who needed it, and this would be his hell: falling through the years, unable to get off at one of them.

Time let him hit the edge of every stone and cliff.

He was not alone in this passage. Other bodies and souls, shot with pain, were thrust past him and through him.

But it ended.

His eyes burned, as if he'd ignored sunglasses during a whole day of lying on the beach. When he managed to focus, an old pump, its paint peeling, was next to him, surrounded by plastic containers.

His head throbbed. He hoped aspirin was in the car. He hoped aspirin worked in situations like this.

Tod looked toward the grass on which a girl had begged for help—his help—but there was no grass. Just a parking lot. No girl. Just his own car.

Drops trickled from the rusty edge of the open spigot.

Maybe he should drop the whole designer water idea.

There *was* something in this water.

THREE



*T*he meadow stretched to the sea. Tall grass, blown down by the wind, lay rumpled like a bed. Clouds scudded into other lives, to hang above other eyes.

Had a boy in strange crude clothing, using strange rude speech, spun briefly through Time just to tell her, “No, nobody will save you”?

Devonny stepped toward the pump, to touch it, and then snatched her hand back, as if it might burn. If she had made up that moment with Mr. Lockwood, perhaps there *was* insanity in the Stratton blood.

She did not hear the clomping of horses coming, nor their windy breath, nor the gentle squeaking of leather saddles, nor the voices of the riders. When a hand touched her shoulder, Devonny cried out, spinning around, ready to fend off another century.

Lord Winden was staring at her.

And Gordon and Miles, with Flossie and a friend she had not expected today, Rose. How splendid they looked, in their formal riding costumes. And how foreign; how unknown to her. She thought: Am I half in Mr. Lockwood’s century? Am I entirely here?

But that way lay madness.

Rose dismounted and rushed to Devonny to hug and kiss her. It felt strange and wrong. What had Tod Lockwood done to her? What veil or mist had he dropped that she could not quite rejoin her time?

“Oh, Devonny!” cried Rose. Her voice was loud and brittle. Devonny wanted to step away from it. “Such news! So thrilling!”

“What news?” she said.

Rose giggled. “Silly girl. That you and darling Lord Winden will be married! Oh, Devonny, I am so happy for you! Lord Winden has been

telling us about his magnificent estate. Devvy, it has two hundred rooms.”

“And no plumbing,” teased Flossie. Her eyes met Devonny’s and they tried to exchange messages, but Flossie’s situation was too complex; they needed time together, and words.

“And in need of a new slate roof,” agreed Lord Winden. “But my bride and I shall remedy such problems.”

At least Devonny would know where her money was going.

“What are you doing here, so far from the house?” asked Rose. “This is such a remote little spot.”

“On the contrary,” said Devonny, “it has a beautiful view. When we were little, Strat and I often played in this meadow.” This was untrue. When they were little, Devonny and Strat could not stand each other, and would never have dreamed of spending an instant in each other’s company.

Devonny saw that she was going to construct a false childhood to tell Lord Winden, because she did not want him to have any part of her. But he will have part of me, she thought. That is marriage.

Far away, on the narrow gravel road that was the only entrance to the Stratton estate, clattered a large open cart, pulled by two extremely heavy, slow horses. Men sat on the open cart, legs dangling. The syllables of their foreign tongue were faintly audible.

Flossie said, “The stonecutters are done, Devonny. The fountain is complete.”

If the stonework was done, Johnny would not return in that cart tomorrow. How would the lovers meet? Was it Devonny’s responsibility to ensure that Flossie and her beloved had time together?

Time.

Who, and what, was Time?

“The turf has arrived,” said Flossie, as if either she or Devonny cared about this, “and the gardeners are unrolling it. Your dear father expects to turn the water on shortly. We shall have a garden party this evening to celebrate the beauty of the spraying fountain.”

“And the joy of our upcoming nuptials,” said Lord Winden. He linked his arm in Devonny’s. “Miles, take my horse back with you. Miss Stratton and I will walk.”

The rest of the party rode away. She was alone with him. A strange man from a strange country. Her fingers tightened on his arm, to hold herself

up, and he liked that, and patted her hand. Devonny wanted to sob. Unlike Tod, Lord Winden would be pleased, because female weakness was pleasing to a man in Devonny's century.

It is the only century I have, she thought. If I do as that boy suggested and just say no, I will be a spinster. A thin beaten woman, alone with a needle and thread. Defective. People might study me briefly to see what's wrong with me, but then they'll laugh, and turn away, and occupy themselves with interesting people. "Why don't you marry an English girl, Winnie?"

He smiled at her. A smile she would share with Lisette. "I fear," said Hugh-David, "that English girls who are suitable are as penniless as I."

"An English girl would understand how you live and what the rules are, Winnie."

"I shall teach you the rules. Your father assures me that you comprehend your marriage vows. You will obey me."

The meadow went steeply uphill. She caught her skirts in her right hand, to keep from tripping. "The Stratton family, by and large, does not care for obedience, Winnie. One does not accumulate millions of dollars by obeying."

"The first thing in which you will obey is this, Miss Stratton. You will not address me as Winnie."

"I think it's a sweet nickname."

"No, you don't. You think it will provoke me, and you are correct. Do not use it again."

She saw their lives together. A verbal battle, in which she must always surrender. She would address him as "sir," then, as if he were a stranger at a ball. "How old are you, sir?"

"I am thirty," he said, and to Devonny this was as terrifying as another century.

"I am afraid," she admitted, and hated herself for it.

"You are very young. But you will love England. My mother is difficult, but if you leave all decisions to her, and if she continues to run the houses herself, you will have no problems. And because you are very beautiful, Society will accept you in spite of your being an American."

Society, in London and New York, worshipped beauty. They painted, photographed, wrote about and loved a beautiful girl.

“It’s pagan, isn’t it?” said Devonny. “If we were really Christian, we would not care about beauty. But we are not Christian. We worship the body. We adore a beautiful face. It, and not God, is first.”

He was shocked. “Of course we are Christian!”

“We go to church,” agreed Devonny.

They were the same height, and their eyes met. He had beautiful eyes: large and gray and calm, with long lashes and straight-across eyebrows.

She said, “I don’t want to wear a borrowed gown meant for somebody else. I might end up in a life meant for somebody else. I even think you want somebody else.”

“My dear, if I were not in great need of money, I should not be taking this step. Winden is not an easy house to maintain. I must put coal in fifty fireplaces, pension my old gamekeepers and nannies, pay cooks and scullery maids, gardeners and yardmen and stable hands. I must maintain carriages and horses.” He smiled again. His was a useful smile, much like a signature on the bottom of a contract. “Think of this as your gift to English civilization. You, and you alone, will save this piece of history, Winden Castle.”

“I am so sorry,” said Devonny, “that the many civil wars of England did not result in the destruction of Winden Castle.”

He burst out laughing.

His laugh was as charming as his accent, and she nearly caved in, nearly let herself like him a little, but she reminded herself that in his description of expenses, Lord Winden was leaving out a great deal. He must have his own tailor, of course, and gambling money. He must have his mistress, and she must have jewels and pleasures. He must be able to go to Paris or even India when the mood took him. And would Devonny go along, or would he leave her with his difficult mother at this castle with its leaking roof and no plumbing?

“It will not be so unhappy as you picture it,” he said to her. “I will not be unfair.”

Flossie will elope for true love, thought Devonny, and I will wed a man who will not be unfair. “After we are wed,” she said tiredly, “when will we make our first visit back to America?”

“Back to America?” he said incredulously. “My dear, once is enough.”

The sun was setting. The newly laid turf was emerald green and the sky a painting in purple.

The entire party—her father and stepmother, Florinda; Flossie and her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Van Stead; Rose; and the three Englishmen, Lord Winden, Gordon and Miles—gathered around the new fountain.

Little boys carved of stone cavorted beneath spray that came from the mouths of dolphins. Circles of sparkling water were tossed into the air, and a spout rose in the middle, casting delicate rainbows.

“And now,” said Lord Winden, “another thing of great beauty. It sparkles almost as much, Mr. Stratton, as your fountain.”

He opened an old leather box held like a platter on the palms of his manservant’s hands.

Resting on ancient crushed velvet was a vast necklace, a throat protector, with hundreds of diamonds.

Flossie gasped.

Rose shrieked.

The ladies crowded forward, making little cries of delight. Devonny’s stepmother removed the delicate cameo that Devonny was wearing, and carefully lifted Devonny’s hair from her neck. Devonny felt as if her neck were being prepared for a sword, not a jewel.

“Granny’s pebbles,” said Lord Winden, enjoying the commotion. He and Florinda fastened it around Devonny’s neck. Diamond ribbons hung from a diamond-encrusted band, utterly hideous and utterly magnificent.

It’s my collar, thought Devonny. I’m his dog, he’s my master.

“Oh, Devonny!” cried Rose, looking adoringly at Lord Winden. “In such a necklace, surely you will meet the Queen.”

“The necklace is very old,” said Lord Winden. “Granny will tell you the history, but it’s been around forever. Everybody’s worn it.”

“I shall have to have a daughter, then,” said Devonny, “to wear it in her turn.”

It was rude to refer to future daughters. A man wanted sons.

“No,” said Lord Winden, denying the possibility of daughters. “You will pass Granny’s pebbles on to our son’s wife.”

“Oh, dear Lord Winden,” cried Florinda, good stepmother and excellent hostess, speeding away from Devonny’s mention of girl babies, “I am in love with you myself. Devonny, darling, I see you wearing the family

necklace, supervising the family castle! You will be welcome at every party. You will have dinner with the Prince of Wales!”

The Prince of Wales, thought Devonny, is a fat old lecher who drinks too much. “The American press,” said Devonny, “does not think much of the current fad of marrying titles. There was an editorial in the *Tribune* that we American girls should seek noble hearts instead of noble names.”

Lord Winden smiled engagingly. “I do not have a heart, my dear.”

The others laughed at this funny little joke, but Devonny believed him.

He did not have a heart.

Tod was much taller than his little soccer team.

Six-year-old girls stared up at him, their little mouths open, their little clothes messed up, their little hairdos as windblown and confused as their expressions.

There had been no parent or adult willing to coach the six-year-old girls, and Tod’s mother had informed her son that this would be good for him. He, Tod, would be their coach, and their role model.

The little girls were completely alien; he might as well have been coaching kangaroos or harp seals.

They did not have the concept of this game at all. They watched the ball now and then but did not get involved with it.

“Hit it with your shoelaces,” said Tod patiently.

“Keep your eyes on the ball,” he said constantly.

His little team couldn’t do that. They had each other to watch, and Tod to watch, and the sky and the birds. They could not get a sense of the action. They were lost right there on their tiny playing field, inside their modified game.

He showed them how to hit the ball with his forehead, and his little girls quite reasonably fell down laughing at the sight of a big boy like Tod whacking a ball with his face.

But they loved him.

Tod had never been loved like that, the pure complete adoration of children for their teacher.

If he wanted them to bat balls off their ears, they would try. If he thought racing up and down a stretch of grass mattered, they would make it matter.

They were thrilled with the color of their team T-shirts (hot purple) but sadly disappointed with the name. “Laura’s Fabric Shop?” said Elizabeth, who could read better than the others. “We thought we’d be Tod’s Team!”

All his little girls had formal names: Elizabeth, Emily, Letitia, Judith, Constance. He thought they’d run harder if they had harder names, so he called them Liz, Em, Tish. “You’re athletes now,” he explained. “You’re fighters. You’re tough.”

They were awed at this description of themselves, and by the end of practice were far more grass-stained than usual, and Tod told them he was proud.

“Devonny!” he yelled. “Keep your eyes on the ball.”

Every little player ground to a halt. “We don’t have a Devonny on the team, Tod,” Tish told him gently.

Tod shivered, as if Devonny’s hair had drifted across his face. “Right,” he said. “I meant Liz.”

I’m normal, Tod told himself, although he had never heard of a normal teenage boy agreeing to coach six-year-old girls’ soccer. Time travel is abnormal. So it didn’t happen.

Tod, who had never thought of texture in his life, who did not know the difference between velvet and denim, found himself remembering the texture of Devonny’s gown. He had no word for that soft glossy stuff. He remembered her tears. For years, Tod had enjoyed making his sister cry—in fact, it was kind of a hobby of his, a successful hobby—but he felt pretty crummy remembering how easily he had made a strange girl cry. He remembered the curls, the strands of hair he had not touched but wanted to. The shock on her face when he left.

He had screwed up big-time. He should have stayed with her and helped.

This was a nauseating thought, and he got rid of it. The last thing he wanted was some romantic nonsense in his life.

“Em!” he bellowed. “Run the other direction!”

Emily eagerly ran the other direction, without remembering to try to take the ball with her. The ball lay alone and forgotten at the wrong end of the field.

Tod engaged his mind, putting it equally on soccer and designer water, leaving no spare brain cell for Devonny Stratton.

After dinner, so the gentlemen could enjoy their cigars and have an intelligent conversation, the ladies left the dining room.

Florinda, as hostess, led with Mrs. Van Stead, while Flossie, Rose and Devonny followed.

“We must discuss gowns,” said Florinda as soon as they were all safely inside the parlor. “It’s going to be so difficult, getting ready so quickly.”

Rose, knowing she would be a bridesmaid, was wildly excited. “Ooooooh, this is so lovely! A grand, grand wedding and the attention of the world. And afterward, you shall live in England. People are so civilized there. Not like here.”

“All Hugh-David wants is my money,” said Devonny. Granny’s pebbles had been returned to their leather case, but her throat felt dented from their weight.

“Then it’s good you have lots of it,” said Rose. “This is so unfair. Mother and I were husband hunting in Saratoga and we didn’t encounter a single possibility. You didn’t hunt for a moment, and up walks the most eligible creature to visit America in years!”

“I’m too young to husband-hunt,” said Devonny.

“And I, too old,” said Rose. “I am twenty-two, and I am getting frightened.”

“There now,” said Florinda, patting her. “You’re a lovely lovely girl, and some fine young man is out there thinking of you even now.”

But Rose was not lovely, and nobody was thinking of her, and they all knew it.

“We shall pair you with one of Lord Winden’s eligible friends,” said Florinda firmly. “That will be your task, Devonny. You must be sure that the groomsmen are unmarried and eager for brides. We will line up the wedding party accordingly.”

“And my Flossie,” said Mrs. Van Stead sharply, “must also be paired with a bachelor.”

She suspects, thought Devonny. She knows Flossie is in love. But she can’t know that the man is Johnny Anello. If she did know, we would be

having a very different conversation. Well, I won't have true love, but Flossie must. "I think, Mrs. Van Stead," said Devonny archly, with much fluttering of eyes and tilting of cheek, "that I have seen Hugh-David's very dear friend Miles gazing upon Flossie. And all too boldly, I have seen Flossie gaze right back."

Mrs. Van Stead was delighted. Danger, for the moment, had passed.

Devonny's stepmother fussed at the neckline of Devonny's dress, tucking fabric down until all possible cleavage was visible. "We must enhance your wardrobe, Devonny," said Florinda. "Your gowns are childish. He will want you displayed." There was emphasis on the pronoun he, for the only person who mattered now was the he in Devonny's life.

Devonny gathered her courage. "What happens in a marriage, Florinda? What is the wedding night for?"

Flossie and Rose held their breath, and waited silently, just as desperate to know.

How uncomfortable the two older ladies looked.

Florinda gently returned the neckline to hide Devonny's figure again. "Well!" she said. "Do you remember the statues of nude men we saw when we traveled to Europe?"

"Yes."

"Do you remember that the men were shaped differently?"

Devonny remembered.

"Well, then. That's that. Now, Devonny, I believe I can convince Hiram that your dear mother must be part of the wedding planning. I see it as a way to get your mother quite a fine wardrobe. I can insist that she must be properly clothed for every event. Oh! A brilliant thought has come to me! Oh! Gather round!"

The ladies held hands in expectation.

"Devonny, I have seen the oil portrait of your dear mother in *her* wedding gown. We could remake it for your wedding! Of course it is completely out of style, but we would add hundreds of pearls! We would reset the sleeves to make them fashionable. And that way, you would be proud as you came down the aisle, and the hearts of your guests would be touched deeply, as you honored your dear mother."

The oil painting was in the attic in the city house. Facing the wall. Once Mama had been as slender and beautiful as Devonny, but abandonment and

poverty had destroyed her.

“But,” said Devonny, “I still don’t know what happens when a man and a woman—”

“Hush. What happens is right. The man decides these things, and you obey.”

“All right, but what does he decide?”

“Devonny, it is not ladylike to linger on these topics.”

Before she could stop herself, Devonny said, “He has a mistress.”

“Lord Winden?” said Rose. “How sophisticated!”

“It is not sophisticated!” said Devonny. “It is disgusting.”

“You said you wanted to marry a man like your father,” Rose said nastily.

I hate you, thought Devonny.

“It is all right for gentlemen to do that,” said Mrs. Van Stead. “Do you know what they say in London? You may do anything you like, as long as you don’t do it in the street and frighten the horses.”

“That’s fine for London,” said Devonny, “but I’m packing Father’s pistol, and if Winnie keeps seeing this woman, he’s a dead man.”

They laughed, as if Devonny had made a joke.

At last the ladies were summoned to rejoin the gentlemen, out on the glassed porch. A fire had been lit in the outdoor fireplace to take the chill off the evening.

Devonny and Flossie lingered until they were alone. Devonny whipped a letter out of her corset.

“Florinda almost found it when she played with my clothes. I was terrified!” They muffled their giggles while Flossie read.

Dearest sweet Flossie,

Now the fountain is complete. Now I have no reason to return to the Stratton estate. My heart aches. In front of my family, my crew and my friends, I laugh and talk. But my heart is in pain. I ache to be with you.

We must name the day. Miss Stratton has promised to help.

*All my love,
Gianni*

“Oh, Flossie, that’s so beautiful!” whispered Devonny. “Does he mean the day you will elope? How will you get to him? Your mother suspects. She will not leave you unsupervised.”

“I know!” whispered Flossie, glowing and sparkling with excitement. “Your wedding!” She clutched Devonny’s arm. “In the excitement of the wedding, I will slip away. I will go with Johnny to City Hall and we will be married. Nobody will notice that I am gone until it is too late. It will be a double wedding, Devonny, but only you and I will know.”

“What a beautiful plan!” breathed Devonny. “There will be a dozen bridesmaids, Flossie, and you will simply—”

Flossie’s mother was upon them. “Give me that letter,” hissed Mrs. Van Stead.

Flossie thrust it behind her, crumpling it, looking for a fire to throw it in. “No, Mama, please, it’s private.”

“Your father is outside the door, young lady. Would you like me to call him and have him see this letter?”

The threat of fathers was very great. Flossie bowed her head and handed the letter to her mother.

Her mother read it silently. “What a ridiculous name. Gianni. Why can’t these people spell? Better yet, why can’t they stay in Italy, where they belong?”

Flossie was weeping.

“This comes of allowing a girl to continue an education. I should never have permitted you to stay in school. It leads to false desires and weak mental behavior. You,” said Mrs. Van Stead to her daughter, loathing and hatred in her voice, “will stay under my supervision.”

She ripped the letter in many pieces. When it was reduced to confetti, she said, “We will not tell your father. It would destroy him.”

“I’m sorry, Mama,” whispered Flossie, trembling.

“Nor will I tell *your* father of *your* terrible behavior, Devonny,” said Mrs. Van Stead. “I am shocked that you would cooperate with Flossie in her silliness. I am certainly glad you are marrying a strong man who will control you!”

She gripped each girl’s arm and escorted them out like prisoners, all three pretending to be laughing and happy over nothing in particular, and

nobody noticed a thing, because not noticing things was important in Society.

The evening passed, and when Devonny looked at her dear friend standing alone in the moonlight, Devonny knew that the fire in Flossie's heart simply burned stronger.

It came to Devonny that Flossie could still elope, on the very date they had thought of, using the very same plan. For Mrs. Van Stead had not shown the note to Mr. Van Stead, and Mrs. Van Stead could not know what "choose the date" meant.

The wedding that would mean prison for Devonny would be escape for Flossie Van Stead.

FOUR



*P*olice had blocked off the streets around Grace Church. The public lined the sidewalks early, for the best view of the wedding party, the famous, and the wealthy. There would be four hundred guests, each of whom must present the ivory vellum invitation. The police would let no one intrude upon the wedding.

Eleven bridesmaids, one maid of honor, the bride, the rector's wife, a florist, two seamstresses, and one stepmother filled the church parlor. The bridesmaids' gowns were old-fashioned, three shades of blush pink, with flounces and ruffles, the skirts so large that not an inch of floor was visible. Their delicate rose pink shoes were covered with seed pearls. Their flowers were white baskets filled with roses and stephanotis and ferns.

Day and night dressmakers had been at work. The crust of pearls added to her mother's wedding gown made the dress so heavy it took three bridesmaids to lift it over Devonny's head. When it was fastened on her body, she could not move. Her father would literally have to walk her down the aisle.

The stays had been laced very tightly. The bridesmaids cooed and ahed at the amazing narrowness of her waist. This is my life, thought Devonny. Laced together by strangers, while a man decides where I walk.

"Oh, Devonny!" cried her friends. Gertrude and Flossie and Victoria, Ethel and Constanza and Ariel, Elizabeth and Rose and Muriel, Eunice and Charity crowded around to touch and gasp over the gown. "You are so beautiful," whispered Maud, her first cousin and maid of honor, though they were not close. "You make a perfect bride." Maud believed this: The gown was perfect, the face was perfect, and so the life would be perfect.

Harriett should have been maid of honor, but Harriett had died. Strat should have been best man, but Strat had vanished. And now Devonny Stratton, too, would vanish, across an ocean and into another name and life. Only Flossie would vanish by choice, and whether that choice was wise or terribly foolish, Devonny did not know.

The parlor was quite lovely: wallpaper of yellow roses, heavy church furniture, carved and mysterious. There were two doors: the door to the sanctuary, and the door to the side vestibule. From the vestibule, one could go outside, or into the parish house, the Sunday School rooms and the great hall.

Flossie's timing must be perfect. No one must notice her slip out of the parlor.

Devonny had seated Flossie's parents behind tall people, so they'd have a poor view of the aisle. Mrs. Van Stead was nearsighted and Devonny didn't think she could pick her own daughter out of the parade.

When the processional had ended, the girls would be lined up along the chancel, enormous gowns like a vast bouquet. If somebody were to count and find one bridesmaid missing, would anybody dream of interrupting the ceremony? No. They would assume the missing girl had fainted from excitement. Ladies did this.

Once Flossie got out of the church, there was no danger—the police, after all, were preventing people from entering, not from leaving. But Flossie had a long way to go, and Devonny would give her every minute she could. Devonny had insisted on an anthem by the boys' choir as well as a solo by the tenor. She was not satisfied with the reading of one psalm, but required three. She would repeat her vows slowly, with much heaving of her girlish breast.

Then would come the recessional, then lots of bustle and photographs, and waving at the public, and leaving for the reception. Very possibly, hours would pass before Mr. and Mrs. Van Stead knew that Flossie was not among the bridal party, and never had been.

The beautiful Gothic nave was filled with Society: matrons, businessmen, millionaires, elderly patrons of the arts. Men wore graceful swallowtail coats. Every lady had been given a corsage, every gentleman a boutonniere.

Not one member of Hugh-David's family was here.

Last night she had asked Hugh-David why not. Even though she was a purchased bride, was it not an event to celebrate?

Lord Winden had merely studied his hands, of which he was very proud. His hands were rather slight, not long or strong enough for work. Everything about Hugh-David was rather slight. "My mother will arrange family celebrations when we return home," he said. "There is every need for you to meet my people, but there is no need for my people to meet yours."

Every day on Devonny's breakfast tray had been a letter from Hugh-David. His letters were not affectionate; they were instructions. His plans, and how she would fit into them. They were un-love letters.

Through the parlor door came Devonny's mother. The first Mrs. Stratton's corsage was too heavy for her gown, and it lopped forward, dragging the dress with it. Though Florinda had arranged for a generous budget at the finest dress shop, poor Aurelia Stratton stood now in a new dress that did not quite fit and was not quite fashionable. She was twitching with anxiety, an apologetic smile darting in and out. Even Devonny could see why nobody invited Mother anywhere. A woman without a man was so completely nothing and nobody.

Last night the family had gathered to sign the contracts. Devonny, both her parents (no matter how many divorces he might have, Hiram's first wife was still Devonny's mother) and their lawyers, and Lord Winden and his lawyers met in the drawing room. Once the signatures were on the papers, the wedding could proceed.

It had been so strange to see Mama in the town house that had belonged to three other wives since. How Mama gaped at the magnificent rooms, as if more interested in the interior decorations that other wives had added or changed than in her own daughter. Oh, Mama! Devonny had thought, yearning to be alone with her parent.

Father had not permitted mother and daughter to talk alone.

Instead, he said *he* would talk to Devonny alone. She had been touched. This was, after all, the last time father and child would be together alone before she was a married woman. She had even smiled at him as they entered his study, as he shut the door behind him, thinking that now, at last, would come the words of encouragement, love and understanding.

“You’re up to something, aren’t you?” he said harshly. He jabbed the bowl of his lit pipe into her stomach. Father could not possibly know Flossie was going to elope right during the wedding. If he had figured that out, he would have gone to Mr. and Mrs. Van Stead.

“You want a scene,” said her father. “You want to toss your pretty hair and refuse to sign the financial documents.” He pinned her to the wall, the enormous shelf of his belly right against her. “If you do anything to delay, Devonny, if by one syllable you make Lord Winden feel unwanted, what is the punishment I explained you would receive?”

“I will never be wed, sir.” A terrible cold isolated life, waiting in a back room, invited nowhere. No children, no love, no life, no hope. It made Lord Winden look desirable indeed.

“You will smile as you sign. You will kiss your fiancé on the cheek, and ask to hold his hand.”

“Yes, Father.”

And then he smiled. Devonny could never see that smile without remembering when Father read a letter from the asylum describing Strat’s whippings. Father’s smile had been so broad it lifted his entire mustache, like a shot rodent. “I have discovered the identity of the blackmailer.”

What relief! The dreaded smile was not for her. “Who is it? Who is responsible? Is there time to stop him?”

Her father did not answer these questions. He said, “I need to know what you think I should do to this person.”

Never had her father asked Devonny’s opinion on anything. She was amazed and proud. But she had no answer. How could anybody be punished without publicity? How could the writer of that evil letter be sent to prison without a trial? Without reporters and scandal?

Was Father toying with her? Did he mean to call the wedding off? Did he, against all evidence, have her best interests at heart? Would there still be some way to back out of this ceremony? Send Lord Winden on his way? But no. Father would never tolerate the furor, the humiliation, the appalling laughter should the wedding be called off.

What an irony, to be safe from the threat and not be able to extricate herself from its consequences.

“I can destroy this person,” said her father softly. “Total isolation, so that the writer of this letter sees neither friend nor foe once more. The

writer will live for years, all in silence, all in solitude. No window. No hope. Abandoned by all, hidden from all. Life reduced to waiting for a tray of cold food silently delivered by an unseen hand.”

If I have to pay so high a price, thought Devonny, so should the evil blackmailer. “Yes, Father! Do that!”

And her father had smiled his terrible rat-and-mongrel-eating smile, and she knew that somehow, in some dreadful way, she had been tricked. But into what? For what?

And now ... the wedding.

The church was laced with flowers: ropes of flowers, towers of flowers. The organ played magnificently. The boys’ choir, robed in scarlet, sang sweetly. But the bride’s heart sank.

“You look lovely, Mama,” she said, although it was not true. Her mother flinched as if struck and turned away. Poor Mama!

Devonny’s father entered.

The presence of a man changed the girls. Eyes dropped and voices lowered. Women might prepare for a great event, but a man would control it.

“Aurelia,” said her father sharply to her mother.

“Yes, Hiram.”

“The groomsman will seat you now.”

“Yes, Hiram.”

The bride and her mother silently touched cheeks, and then the first Mrs. Stratton took the arm of the head usher. She would traverse the aisle to Handel’s *Water Music*, stately but joyful. Devonny hoped her mother could think of this as a happy event.

Devonny said, “A kiss, dear Flossie.”

There was a shifting of gowns, a pressing up against one another, to give Flossie room to reach Devonny. She and Flossie touched cheeks. Her own was blazing hot. The pink of her complexion would please the guests. Flossie’s cheek was cold and afraid. Slowly the girls released each other and stepped back. Would they see each other again in this life? Would their husbands permit it?

The bridesmaids lined up. There was not room to form a straight line, so they curled among each other, giggling and excited.

Maud, as maid of honor, tucked the veil over Devonny's face, careful to crush none of the flowers in Devonny's hair arrangement.

It was safe behind the veil. No one could see into her eyes and know what she felt, or what she and Flossie had planned.

Devonny had a surprising memory of the months in California, when she had flirted with Randal. She remembered the sun, how it never failed; the boys, how relaxed and full of laughter. In California, there was a sense of time, time to do whatever came up, time to laugh and talk and be.

I am out of time, thought Devonny.

Tod Lockwood did not normally read books. He obeyed his teachers and turned in his assignments, and this did mean reading. Whole pages. Now and then a complete book. His sister had given him a book for a good-bye present when she left for Norway. "You are boring, Tod. You need to widen your horizons. So I've bought you a travel guide." Tod hadn't even glanced at the title. He was just grateful that a sister who understood him so poorly was leaving the country.

Months later, he happened upon the book, and here it was a travel guide to *The World's Most Dangerous Places*. Tod was hooked. So far he'd studied up on visiting Chechnya (where everybody was busy slaughtering each other) and Algeria (where wacko fundamentalists and war veterans liked to cut throats), and now he was deep into Colombia (a must-see, explained the author, for anybody planning a vacation in hell).

He found himself deeply restless, as if he *could* have gone to all those dangerous places, but had opted to stay home.

He kept walking away from the book, as if from his failed self, and walking back to stare at the title.

He had traveled to a dangerous place, and by a dangerous route. And what had he done in the presence of danger? He had pretended it wasn't happening. Brushed off the girl who needed him; him specifically; not just anybody! Him, Annie's brother!

He felt loose inside, as if his heart and lungs and guts were going their own way, leaving him to gasp and writhe.

He felt Devonny's fear, and heard his own stupid words. Over and over he saw himself stepping away from her, going back to his dumb designer water when he was needed in another world.

Her father glowed with pride. A man must create a strong son and a beautiful daughter. Well, the strong son had been a bad son, and now was either a missing son or a dead son, but Devonny had turned out to be a beautiful and obedient daughter.

He did not embrace her. She could not recall ever being hugged by her father. He jutted his elbow toward her, and she tucked her gloved hand around his arm and surrendered to her fate.

The music ceased. The preludes were over; now it remained only to move the bridal party to the altar.

There was a moment of total expectant silence.

Nobody had seen the wedding gown. Most guests had not seen the groom, and a view of a titled Englishman was always delightful. Now, in this silence, the rector and Hugh-David would be emerging from the sacristy to wait for Devonny near the altar.

In the curving bridesmaid line, Flossie was closest to the side door and the cloakroom. Devonny must permit no one to see Flossie step back into the vestibule. "Oh, Father," she said, looking up at his big drooping walrus mustache, his grossly fat neck, as wedged into its starched collar as she was into her corset. Do I love my father? she thought. I don't think so. How could anybody love him? And yet—I want to please him. I want to have a family full of love. "How I wish Strat were here," she said. "I miss him so."

He softened. (Hiram Stratton in a soft moment!) "I, too, Devonny. Now be my brave girl. This is best for all of us."

The trumpets began. Their climbing chords of celebration filled the great stone chamber, and then were joined by the massive organ. Even Devonny was thrilled. The stone lace of Grace Church, the chilly beauty of its gothic peaks and arches, spoke to her soul.

The first bridesmaid, Muriel, moved out of the parlor and down the great aisle. She was trembling. Her basket of flowers quivered. The guests turned to stare, but they did not stand. They would stand only for Devonny.

Esther, the second bridesmaid, followed.

Then Constanza, the third.

Now the girls could straighten their line, while the seamstresses knelt to fluff crinolines and tug at hems. No one looked at anything except the aisle down which she would walk.

Devonny felt the motion of Flossie leaving.

She squeezed her father's arm to keep his attention on her, and to her amazement, he patted her hand, as if he loved her.

Perhaps he does, she thought. Perhaps Hugh-David will too, one day, and perhaps I will love them. I must believe that.

The fourth bridesmaid took her first step, and at the same moment, the side door gently closed.

Devonny Aurelia Victoria Stratton prayed for the future of Mrs. Gianni Anello.

The fifth bridesmaid.

The sixth.

Flossie must have her coat on by now, the faded shapeless one she had stashed in the back hall. Her bouquet would be tossed on a shelf, pins yanked from her hair, ribbons stuffed in her pocket, big old scarf tied over her head. She wouldn't waste time buttoning the coat, just pull it around herself, and surely by now she was out of the church and among the crowd.

Her father said casually, "By the way, in the morning I shall begin the punishment of the writer of that letter."

How unfair of Father, how crude, to mention the blackmail now!

"Your mother wrote that letter," said her father, smiling. His big yellow teeth moved like a horse grinding over its bit. "She thought if you were married to a titled Englishman, you would send for her; she would go to live in England, and have a wonderful life after all, and see the Queen, and have fine clothing again."

The seventh bridesmaid left.

"But she is mistaken," said Hiram Stratton. "She will be sealed in the attic. I expect she will survive for two or three decades. With no sun, no air, no visits, no sounds, no friends, no daughter. But food, of course. I want to sustain life, so that she may continue to suffer."

The eighth bridesmaid.

Devonny swayed, and her father's ham-sized hand supported her. "No one crosses me," he said softly. "I am glad that you agreed on the punishment."

The ninth bridesmaid.

"Mother wrote the letter?" whispered Devonny. But yes, she could see it now. The handwriting was Mother's, and the beautiful paper. Oh, the desperation! the poverty! the joylessness! that had made this seem rational to Mama. Mama, in the dark shabby cold house in Brooklyn, whispering to herself, scratching out a letter, planning her new life, believing it would come true.

The tenth bridesmaid.

"No, Father," she breathed through the veil, standing on tiptoe to get close to his ear. "Let Mother go. It doesn't matter. I am proud to be wed as you choose. I shall be the best of wives. I promise that I shall do exactly as I am told, forever. I shall always behave! Please do not punish Mama!"

"Your mother made her choices and she will suffer her consequences."

"She didn't choose to be divorced, Father! She didn't choose to live in poverty."

The rector's wife and the florist and the seamstresses closed in on them. "So sweet," said the rector's wife, patting Devonny's bare shoulder, "to see you and your dear papa sharing these last minutes."

The flower girls—Ethel's three-year-old twins, gold hair in ringlets—were readied. They carried baskets of rose petals to strew so that Devonny would walk on flowers. The little girls were giggling and afraid and thrilled.

Oh, Strat! Come save me! Oh, somebody! Please save me! Save Mama, save me from knowing what my own mother did, save me from this marriage, don't let me know the truth about my parents, don't let me find out what marriage is from this man who can't even be bothered to invite anybody, please please save me.

"Here we are!" beamed the rector's wife. "Last in line!"

I am last in line, thought Devonny. I am quite literally last in line. Everyone else comes ahead of me.

Lord Hugh-David Winden loved clothing, and had chosen his as carefully as any woman in the church. Gordon and Miles stood with him, while the ushers (people Hiram Stratton knew; nobody who mattered) formed a long swallow-tailed row behind them.

The flowers that filled the great sanctuary had been sped by train from the American South. How delightful to know that he, too, would be able to afford train-loads of hothouse flowers.

He felt a surprising surge of emotion as the bridesmaids appeared. How slowly they approached, trumpet music their only escort. The girls were beautiful, even the plain ones.

Devonny. A strange but beautiful name, just as American girls were strange but beautiful.

Americans believed they could create themselves. Always the singing lesson, the dancing lesson, the drawing lesson. Always studying foreign languages and history. If you tried hard enough, said the American girl, you could achieve anything. It was a matter of will.

Devonny had plenty of will.

He was eager to see how Devonny managed his mother. Lord Winden's mother was overwhelming, especially to Lord Winden. A wife like Devonny might actually be an ally; together, he and his new wife might ... No. These things rarely happened. The marriages he knew were full of trauma. Men and wives led separate lives.

He counted bridesmaids.

To his amazement, Hugh-David could hardly wait to see his bride. What will the gown look like? he thought. Will she be the vision I'm expecting? Will she be hidden by a veil? Will she be weeping? Will she smile?

Gordon whispered in his ear. "She's so embarrassingly American, Hugh. You shall have to perform radical surgery on her."

Hugh-David allowed a slight smile to decorate his formal expression. Gordon had witnessed Devonny beating him at tennis, riding her bicycle with a split skirt, and even, when she fell off the bike, jumping up in disgust and shrieking a swear word. Gordon had been horrified and amused, muttering that Hugh-David would have to be very careful, lest the girl turn into her father: fat, stomping and vulgar. But Hugh-David had found her immensely attractive. Not ladylike. But attractive.

He knew he had been a tiny bit mean to Devonny, but it was essential, with a headstrong young girl, to be sure she knew whose world she was entering. His.

It was his hunt, his shoot, his yacht, his party, his estate.

He would be kind to her during the voyage, but he would structure their lives so that she learned to obey.

One bridesmaid to go.

Then the flower girls.

Then the bride. His bride. His new property.

In the space where pink ruffled skirts and white baskets of flowers had been, Devonny began to see something very odd.

An angel was joining them.

Devonny could see the angel quite clearly, and just as the Bible said, the angel was a beautiful man.

He did not have flesh, just form. She could make out his outlines, but not his body. He was kneeling, which seemed fine for an angel.

Her father was not looking.

Devonny whispered to the angel, "Am I to die? Is that to be my fate?"

Now the angel did not look like an angel at all, but more like a devil, strangely familiar. Devonny narrowed her eyes, trying to focus on him.

Her father said, "Come, Devonny."

She could not move. He put his large heavy hand on her waist, half circling it, and, with the church ladies, launched her forward. The gown followed, the train weighing so much it was like towing furniture.

The angel stood up.

It was no angel. It was Tod Lockwood.

Her father continued to walk, in the slow awkward shift of body they called "the hesitation step." His great weight pulled her along.

Tod had come for her, as his sister, Annie, had once come for Strat.

Flossie yanked the crinoline down, stepped out of it, smashed the enormous stiff undergarment beneath her feet and crammed it behind some old pew, pulled silk and ribbons out of her hair and chucked them

into the umbrella stand. Flinging her arms into her old coat, she turned the circular handle of the old wooden door and eased herself out onto the street.

This was the back of the church; the crowds were massed out front for the best view. If people turned, all they would see was a woman in an ill-fitting coat, tying an old scarf over her messy hair. Flossie walked away. The bridesmaid skirt was a little too long, and she kept catching her slippers on it. Around the corner, on a park bench, she sat down to rip the lowest ruffle right off. There. Now she wouldn't fall.

She stuffed the pink satin strip into a pocket of the coat and ran on. The delicate slippers were not designed for pavement, and began to tear apart in only a few blocks.

The sky was not yet winter gray, but still autumn blue. The sun was thin but friendly, and the city seemed buoyant and happy to Flossie. She jumped puddles and broken sidewalk slates. She circled peddlers and cabbies and shoppers and nannies.

Laughter bubbled in her throat and smiles danced on her face. She, Florence Elizabeth Ruth Van Stead, was going to become Mrs. Gianni Anello.

By now, the wedding procession would be finished. Her mother and father, neatly seated in their pew, her father's top hat on his lap, her mother's egret feathers towering above anybody else's, would be proudly turning to see their daughter.

But between Rose and Eunice there would be no Flossie.

They must have changed the order, her mother would think. Flossie will be next.

But instead, the flower girls would come.

How on earth did I miss her? Mother would wonder, trying to discern the girls already near the altar. Mother would not dream of disfiguring her face with spectacles, and would not be able to see. Father, though he would be confused, would not remark on it, for weddings were the stuff of females, and he would just assume he had misunderstood.

The ceremony would last over an hour because of all the music and scripture Devonny had added. By that time, Flossie and Johnny would have reached City Hall. By the time Devonny and her groom finished with

the receiving line, why, Flossie and Johnny might have said their *own* marriage vows!

She was hugging herself with joy. She could feel the shape of Johnny inside her arms. She could hardly wait to see his beautiful smile, hear his exuberant laugh.

She reached Washington Square and rushed to the elm under which they had agreed to meet.

No Johnny was there.

Benches lined the park. Oak and ash and plane trees were bare now, and the fallen leaves swirled about her ankles. Flossie walked carefully, neatly, not letting herself think about it, past every bench sitter. She smiled at the pretty little dogs on leashes and the sweet children in perambulators.

No Johnny.

The magnificent new arch, in honor of George Washington, made a brilliant gateway. She walked calmly to the arch, and around it, and through it, but Johnny was nowhere to be seen.

She stood beside the statue of Garibaldi, presented by the Italians of New York, but her own personal Italian was not there.

She found a bench. She sat on the very edge, ready to leap into the air at the first sight of him.

The minutes passed.

The sun moved down in the sky.

Johnny Anello did not come.

Hiram Stratton liked the idea of a title in the family. England ruled the world, and Parliament was her voice. And what a world England was! India and Hong Kong and Australia and Kenya ...

His daughter would enter that world; her money would give that man more power; Hiram's grandchildren would inherit everything: the Stratton millions, the Winden estates, the power of the British Empire!

Devonny had wanted to marry a man who would accomplish something. With my money, my dear, thought Hiram Stratton, patting her little gloved hand as he studied the famous faces along the church aisle, perhaps he will. After all, somebody is going to have to rule India. Why not Winden?

Ruling an entire country was an attractive thought. Hiram thought he would practice saying India the way the British pronounced it: Innn-jah!

A moment ago, they had been moving forward, but now they stopped. Hiram Stratton assumed the flower girls were slow, and he thought nothing of it. The church pleased him: filled with people come to admire his daughter's beauty and his daughter's titled catch. Wives would stare at Lord Winden and be jealous, because this great catch had gone to somebody else's daughter. Husbands would stare at Devonny and wish they were young again.

There was nothing quite so wonderful as Society feeling jealous of you.

He was oddly impressed by his ex-wife's strategy. Aurelia had done an excellent job. He hated to admit how readily he had been conned into action he had not planned. The woman had almost gotten away with it. But Aurelia had given him two great gifts: the gift of this wedding and glorious future ... and the gift of her punishment.

He felt a frisson of pleasure at the thought of her life to come.

He planned her next few hours. The wedding, of course, would be a triumph. Aurelia, unknowing of her fate, would be escorted back to the seashore mansion, while Devonny and her groom left for their journey on one of the great cross-Atlantic ships. Devonny would quickly forget her mama. And he, Hiram Stratton, who forgot nothing, ever, would enjoy watching the carpenters nail boards over the windows, while Aurelia chose which blanket to keep with her in the unheated attic.

Hiram felt a strange cold tug, as if some fool had opened a door to winter and let in a vicious wind.

He turned, and his face hurt slightly, icy in spite of the brushy thick beard and draping mustache. He put his hand up as if to wipe away snow, and in doing so, he realized that Devonny's arm was not resting on his, and that Devonny—

—that Devonny—

Devonny!

Tod's university sweatshirt was a size extra large, although Tod himself was medium. It hung to his hips, and the cuffs went past his fingertips. His sneakers were his old ones, without decent laces, so they hung open like

dogs' mouths. His base ball cap was on backward, and his hair, which badly needed a trim, stuck out irregularly along the edges. His braces had broken during the week but Tod had not been in the mood to see the orthodontist, so he'd just smudged on that gummy wax the dentist gave you to cover rough braces edges.

Time was ice, was zero.

His skin, his teeth, his fingers, his gut hurt from the cold. He closed his eyes, but the brutal wind burned through his lids. He felt like a skier going down an advanced slope in Canada in February wearing only a T-shirt. His skin would come off, he would die or be hospitalized.

Tod tried to come to grips with his sister's courage, doing this willingly, but the cold and wind and speed were too terrible. He could only wait it out. He was Time's property.

He had agreed to come, but he had expected to run the show.

He had a sense of landing, and a sense that he could refuse to let his body arrive completely, and a sense that even for one who wanted to travel to dangerous places, this was not wise. He could not find a grip, or a purpose, just cold and fear. His stretching hand found Devonny's, and he seized it, and flung himself back the way he had come.

In their pew, Mr. and Mrs. Van Stead smiled at one another.

How well they had handled the potential disaster with the Italian boy! Luckily, a loyal servant had showed them yet another of those foolish letters. The ridiculous girl had actually intended to *marry* the stonecutter! It was revolting, but whatever silly little plan their daughter had cooked up would not work now.

Mr. Van Stead had had the boy picked up. Gianni Anello was on his way back to Italy.

The captain of the cargo ship had promised to keep him locked up until the ship was safely out to sea, and that took care of that.

Scandal had been averted. And if Flossie's heart was broken—well, headstrong young girls needed to be broken before marriage, like colts.

Mrs. Van Stead could not see Flossie among the pink blurs at the front, but she hoped that Gordon or Miles was looking at her fondly. Hoped Gordon or Miles was sufficiently broke to want Flossie, because it was

certainly necessary to get Flossie married instantly. Why, the girl's behavior implied a low-class, animal, physical attraction to that boy!

Rearing girls was so difficult, and so unrewarding.

Hiram Stratton said thickly, "Where is my daughter?"

The church ladies stared at him, looking wildly around, as if Devonny were a teacup that must be sitting on a shelf somewhere.

The flower girls went down the aisle, strewing their rose petals. The trumpet music ceased. There was a pause in which everybody straightened, for this was the one time in a lady's life in which she was important: this short walk, in this long gown.

But there was no bride.

FIVE



The guests were having a wonderful time.

No bride!

They were thoroughly enjoying the humiliation of the groom; most eager to witness the fury of the father. Some of the guests stood on the velvet-cushioned pews for a better view.

The bridesmaids could do nothing but stand in their semicircle, clinging to their baskets.

The groom remained calm. How British! He stood as coolly as if this were merely a problem with the gown, a torn hem perhaps, and any moment his bride would glide into his arms.

How could Devonny complain about securing a catch like this? thought Constanza. The man is handsome, courteous and needs her money. There's nothing quite so nice in a marriage as being needed.

Then came a thought so hideous and exciting that Constanza had to share it with Rose. "What if Devonny has jilted him?"

"She wouldn't dare," whispered Rose without moving her lips. "Leave the man standing at the altar? In front of everybody? With a crowd of hundreds outside to know about it, and a dozen reporters to put it in every paper?"

"Nobody would forgive her," added Eunice, who hoped it was a jilting. She had always wanted to witness such a thing, and here she was, only a few feet from the groom. Such a handsome fellow. Perhaps—

No. If an American jilted him, he would go back across the Atlantic in the morning and never associate with Americans again. In fact, if Devonny jilted Lord Winden, it would ruin everybody's chance of grabbing a title.

Eunice became angry at Devonny. What a wretched thing to do to the rest of them! Devonny was so selfish.

“Where is Flossie?” Eunice whispered to Constanza.

“Between you and Elizabeth,” whispered Constanza, irritated. Wasn’t this delay awkward enough without Eunice being a fool?

Constanza looked up and down the semicircle to be sure she was correct that Flossie stood between Eunice and Elizabeth.

There was no Flossie.

Constanza studied the entire line. Flossie was not among them. How very peculiar. Had Flossie felt too faint to march in? Or had Flossie joined the search for Devonny?

From the back came a huge bellow, a voice that seemed too large even for the large body of Hiram Stratton. “My daughter! My daughter has been kidnapped! I was warned! But I did not take it seriously! My daughter has been kidnapped!”

The most difficult thing Hugh-David Winden had ever done was to walk back down that aisle ... without a bride. He smiled courteously at the guests, ignored their hot gossiping eyes, said nothing to the barbed taunts they meant him to overhear. He made it out of the sanctuary and into the parlor, where Hiram Stratton was shouting to the police. “A man snatched her. Right from my arms!”

“Are you sure she didn’t just leave?” said a policeman sternly. “Jilting a man has been done, sir. Done a lot more than kidnapping.”

Hugh-David wondered which he would prefer. To be publicly humiliated—a man so undesirable that a lady had to flee the church rather than be united with him—or to have Devonny’s life in jeopardy.

“It’s true!” cried the florist. “She was here and then she wasn’t!”

“I saw him!” shouted Hiram. “It was kidnapping!” He was red in the face, strangled by his collar and his fury. “He took my daughter’s arm and snatched her! I should have hired more police! Why didn’t you stop this heinous event?”

Miles and Gordon had followed Lord Winden out of the church. Now Miles pressed up against Hugh-David. “We must leave,” he whispered. “I

knew this Stratton fellow was so abominable only the worst could happen.”

Miles and Gordon would take this humiliation home with them. They’d dine out on the story for years. How amused his mother and brothers and cousins would be. It hardly bore thinking of.

“No money is worth this, Hugh,” said Gordon. “Cut your losses and quit.”

Devonny was a bet, and I lost, thought Hugh-David. Time to fold.

The bridesmaids had joined them, sobbing and crying out, their huge gowns rustling, the thorns from their roses poking and stabbing. “Do you really mean it?” came their cries. “A threat against Devonny? How could you not have told us? How could you let this happen, Mr. Stratton?”

In the midst of Hugh-David’s anger and humiliation came a splinter of fear. The girls were genuinely afraid for Devonny. If she were jilting me, he thought, she would have confided in one of them. Or in all of them. But she did not.

The police rushed senselessly around the church, as if a bride in a flowing white gown had slid behind a pillar or was resting in the chapel.

Hiram Stratton could not describe the kidnapper or the kidnapper’s clothing. He could not explain how his daughter had been taken from him without a fight.

He insisted the kidnapper was alone. But how could one man, wondered Hugh-David, no matter how strong and determined, lift a bride whose gown was so heavy the bride herself could not move? The Devonny who had beaten him in golf and tennis, who had ridden a horse and a bike, who had talked back and argued—wouldn’t this Devonny have resisted? Surely at least she would have dropped her flowers; she would have screamed.

Hiram Stratton was having a tantrum, pounding a heavy carved oak chair on the stone floor.

It’s Hiram Stratton who demanded speed, thought Hugh-David. Hiram Stratton who set the wedding date for one month from my request for Devonny’s hand. I was in no rush. After all, my bills have not been paid in months, some of them not in years. Let my creditors wait longer, I don’t care.

Is it Hiram who now does not want it? Could Hiram Stratton himself have arranged a kidnapping? But to what end? No man wants scandal

involving his daughter. And if he wanted to call off the wedding, he would never have done it in front of his own guests.

The police found nobody outside the church who had seen the bride. A dress described as vast, ornate and glittering? A thousand onlookers could not have missed Devonny's exit.

They began a grim search of cellar and belfry, back stairs and offices, classrooms and kitchens. Plenty of places to drag a girl—perhaps smothered by a drug, perhaps strangled by a wicked hand and plenty of places to have a carriage waiting.

Hugh-David thought of what could happen to a beautiful sixteen-year-old girl in the hands of thugs.

"Kidnapping!" exclaimed Gordon. "It's so American, so vulgar. You cannot have this scandal attached to your name."

"It is not attached to my name," said Hugh-David. "It is attached to Miss Stratton's." She would be ruined. No one would marry a girl who might have been raped. No one. Including Hugh-David.

Hugh-David found himself comforting the mother, the real mother, the first Mrs. Stratton. The poor thing was sobbing uncontrollably. "What will become of me now?" she said over and over.

What will become of *you*? thought Hugh-David, shocked. How could the woman think of herself instead of her daughter?

Gordon muttered, "Come, Hugh. It is unthinkable that you should have anything more to do with this Stratton crowd."

But they had forgotten Hiram Stratton, and his great bulk, and temper, and power.

"There is no crowd of Strattons," said Hiram. "There is one Stratton, and I am he." He smiled a terrible smile, his lips stretched like cords. In his jowls a muscle twitched, making his beard jump. "And you, Hugh-David Winden, will stay. My innocent name is at stake."

Your name? Hugh-David was stunned, for he had thought Devonny surrounded by love. But Devonny's father and mother had no more regard for Devonny than Hugh-David's father and mother had for him.

"Really, sir!" said Gordon coldly to Mr. Stratton. "There is no need to behave like a ruffian on a frontier."

Hugh-David remembered himself in the garden at the mansion by the sea, playing games with her—this very young girl about to become his

wife—and saying to her, “I do not have a heart, my dear.”

She is alone and terrified in the hands of evil, thought Hugh-David, *and knows better than to expect anything from me.*

The man who had Devonny was the most shocked of all. He had not had a master plan; if he had, it would not have included bringing Devonny into his time, wearing a dress the size of a school bus, carrying enough flowers for two funerals, and sobbing from behind a veil.

“My mother!” she cried. “How will I save my mother? She will be held responsible! Father will keep her alive in the attic for decades! She will suffer so! Where is this? Where are we? Strat must be here! Do you have Strat? He will know what to do, you don’t know anything! Why are you wearing a shirt with a hog on it?”

Tod was offended. He had a large collection of college team sweatshirts, and razorback hogs were the best. She had just insulted his favorite sweatshirt. “I told you before, I don’t have Strat!” he yelled back.

“Then take me home!”

“How am I supposed to do that? Throw you at the pump handle? Toss you in the sea? What are you doing in that ridiculous dress? I can’t even fit you through the car door.”

“You came to rescue me, now rescue me!”

“What am I supposed to do with you?” he yelled.

“You ’re supposed to help me find my brother!”

He stopped yelling because he was giving himself a sore throat, but also because runners were approaching. It was too late in the year for sunbathing or sailing, but runners never knew when to quit.

To his disgust, Tod knew the runners: four girls in his high school who were on the varsity basketball team and thought they were perfect. They were wearing designer spandex, tighter than skin, and designer sneakers, and designer sweatbands, and as they ran up to him, laughing hysterically at the sight of Devonny in her wedding gown, they came to a halt but continued running in place.

“What is *this*?” shrieked Tory, giggling at Devonny.

“What a hoot!” said Jill, poking at the skirt, which appeared to be covered in jewels. Tod could not imagine how they got jewelry to stick to

the skirt. There had to be a million little pearls on there.

Tod hated being laughed at. And to think he had worried about her and let himself get involved! Women!

“This is Annie’s friend, Devonny,” said Tod with dignity, “and we are participating in a contest. You guys are ruining it for us. After all we’ve gone through, now we’re going to lose! Get out of the picture.”

“Are you being filmed?” said Tory, horrified that she might be ruining a movie.

“Of course we’re being filmed! Do you think she would dress like this and yell at me like this for any other reason? Beat it!” yelled Tod. “You’re supposed to be runners. Run.”

The girls were smart enough to see there were no cameras around, no film crews. But there had to be, or why would this woman be dressed so weird? Embarrassed and uncertain, they jogged out of range of whatever was going on.

“Get in the car, Devonny,” Tod muttered. He could hardly budge her. The gown weighed more than all his gallons of water. He shoved her toward his ancient station wagon. Nobody drove station wagons anymore; his parents had bought the thing for Annie, and this year Tod inherited it. It was immense and tanklike. Mr. and Mrs. Lockwood said if a car accident happened, the other guy would be squished like a tuna fish can, while Annie or Tod would drive away with nothing more than a scratch on the bumper.

But it was impossible to stuff Devonny in. First of all, she would not cooperate, and second of all, her dress wouldn’t crumple up enough. “That dress has gotta go.” He yanked a pair of blue jeans from the backseat (Tod did not believe in doing laundry; he just stored used clothing wherever he might need it), snatched up a T-shirt he used to clean the windshield, and thrust them in her face. “Wear these. We gotta look normal. I gotta think of something to do with you.”

She had taken off her veil, at least, and now turned her back to him. “You’ll have to unbutton me.”

Fifty-six teeny-weeny little buttons he could hardly get his fingers around. Tod could not believe this was happening to him. He refused to turn around to see how the runners were behaving.

Underneath the huge gown she had another gown, satiny, with a definite resemblance to something from the inner pages of the Victoria's Secret catalog. Whoa, thought Tod. Devonny tried to stuff the gown down into the jeans.

"Zipper goes in front," said Tod. "Gimme the bottom dress, you can't wear that either. I'm not looking, I'm busy folding up your dresses. Put on this T-shirt."

Devonny was facing the strange, bounding females in that hideous clothing, which clung to their very outlines. Did they think they were mermaids? Men were not supposed to know what girls looked like. It made her so uncomfortable to think of Tod viewing these things.

Now he wanted her to take off her undergarments! Summoning her courage, Devonny peeled them off. Tod had lied and was looking after all. "*What is that thing?*" he said, horrified.

How could he be horrified by a perfectly sensible corset and not even notice a woman wearing a purple skin? But then she remembered that Annie had not known what a corset was either. Annie had had on the strangest little connected flowery cups instead. Devonny pulled the white shirt on. It was not clean. She could not believe she was wearing a shirt with filth on it.

"I can't wear so little clothing," she whispered, starting to cry. Tod peeled off his own shirt—a bizarre heavy thing without a front or back opening—and yanked it down over her head.

Devonny had certainly never imagined the moment would come when she would wear a picture of a pig on her body. But the long heavy sleeves felt good, sort of fleecy, and she felt safer inside it.

Tod crammed the entire wedding gown into the back of his motor car, and she shuddered, thinking how it might rip or acquire a stain, and then she remembered that she did not care about this gown, nor the occasion for which she had worn it.

"Get in front," he ordered her, but she could not locate the door, and Tod had to stuff her in and then encircle her with straps to hold her down. "I won't go anywhere," she assured him.

“I can’t believe this is happening to me,” he said. He twisted a key near his lap and the vehicle roared. Devonny screamed. “It’s okay,” he shouted, “I just need a new muffler. Not to worry.”

The vehicle leaped away. Roaring, it flew down roads that did not exist on Devonny’s estate. And yet she was on her own estate, her summer cottage, even though her wedding had been in New York City. How had this happened? How had Tod come for her, all the while keeping his feet on the ground here? She did not feel rescued. She felt as if things were a hundred times worse.

She had to believe that Strat was waiting for her; that wherever Tod was taking her was a place where Strat had been, and would be again, and Strat would know what to do.

Tod’s motorcar faced right at other vehicles, not one of which had the same shape or color, but all of which roared and rushed and glittered. He did not smash any of them, but it was not for lack of trying.

She covered her eyes and tried not to sob. What have I done? thought Devonny. How can I undo it?

She peeked between her fingers. They were leaving her estate and hurtling at incredible speed toward the village. She recognized a building here and there, but was badly shaken by the number of houses. Not an inch of farm or meadow. Houses, houses, houses.

“Do you have to go so fast?” she whispered.

“We’re crawling. We’re doing forty.”

“I’m going to throw up,” said Devonny.

“Don’t even think about it,” said Tod. “Bad enough I have to take the dog to the vet’s—I’m not cleaning up after you!”

“You are a hateful rude unpleasant mean person.”

“You got it,” said Tod. “And now we have to think of an explanation to give my mother and father for why a hateful rude unpleasant mean guy like me is rescuing you.”

“I don’t call this a rescue,” said Devonny.

“You got out of the wedding, didn’t you?”

She began sobbing. “But my father will never forgive me! And he will take it out on my mother! It will all be my fault, even though I didn’t mean any of it to happen. And no man will ever marry me now. Not after leaving my groom at the altar!”

“He was standing there?” said Tod, looking happy. “Cool. I wonder what they’re doing. Wonder how he’s handling it? Is he the kind of guy who can deal?”

Devonny struggled with Tod’s vocabulary. She could not imagine Hugh-David doing anything but vanishing. A ship, a horse, a hotel—he would go, wiping Devonny from his thoughts the way his manservant wiped mud from his shoes.

“The problem is what to do next,” said Tod. “We have to think of a good lie for Mom and Dad.”

“It’s wrong to lie to your parents,” Devonny told him.

“Dev, my parents will not deal well with the truth. I know—you’re an exchange student. You’re from England. Can you do a British accent? Your host family didn’t work out, you’ve gotta have a place to stay for a few days, and I volunteered—since my sister’s on an exchange, it seemed only fair. Let’s hear your British accent. Talk for me.”

Devonny had practiced a British accent, but it embarrassed her. It was beautiful when the English spoke, but she just sounded pathetic. She mustered her courage and said in her most British voice, imitating the plummy elegant sounds of Hugh-David, “How terribly kind of you, Mrs. Lockwood, to welcome me into your home in my hour of need. Your son is a hero in my eyes.”

“That’s pouring it on a little thick,” said Tod. “They know I’m not a hero, and I don’t want anybody to think I like you or anything.”

Devonny stopped worrying about their speed. In an even more British accent, she said, “How terribly kind of you, Mrs. Lockwood, to allow me to visit. My sympathies about your son. It must be difficult to live with such a cad.”

Tod howled with laughter. “They’ll love it, Dev. It’s perfect.”

The vehicle stopped in front of a strange-looking house, sharp angles with windows in the wrong places. The top piece of house was larger than the bottom piece of house, as if it had arrived at the wrong place. Tod drove straight toward two large wooden squares as if he meant to drive right into the building—and then he touched a button on the lid of his vehicle, the building opened and he *did* drive in.

Rusting containers and bent tools hung on the stable walls. Boxes of empty jars and cans stood next to a bicycle with a twisted wheel.

Tod slid out of his seat and strode into the house.

I must have hope, Devonny told herself. I am like a Pilgrim from the Old World sailing with blind hope across the ocean. I, however, sailed across Time. Its shores are unknown to me, even as they were unknown to the pioneers. I must believe that Tod will reach my brother, and my brother will know what to do.

Devonny struggled with the black straps he had locked around her. They would not come away. She pulled at the one around her waist but it held tightly. She could not release herself. Dust and dark closed in on her.

Flossie was pressed up against the side of a brick building, furtively staring at the little park where she had expected Johnny to be. She had torn the frail lace of her gloves scraping them back and forth against the bricks. She had pulled her coat so tight against cold and fear that the seams were ripping.

She had sacrificed all ... and Johnny was not here.

The grief that swept over her was hot. Shame was a fever.

She remembered every syllable Johnny had ever said in her presence. His gallant manner, the heavy accent that made each sentence so charming. His letters, his begging, his eyes.

All that—a joke. He had just been flirting. Those beautiful words of love—a game. Perhaps he and the crew had placed bets on how much foolishness Flossie would believe.

He is at home, thought Flossie, among his brothers and cousins, laughing at me. I—like a stupid girl, like the whole history of stupid girls—believed every word he said.

Beautiful New York became grim New York. The magnificent horses pulling carriages were just huge sweating animals whose urine stank and steamed on the cobblestones. There was no soft romantic autumn air, just choking dust from cinder barrels that lined the sidewalks, waiting for pickup. Starched and courteous nannies pushing babies had gone home for tea, replaced by panhandlers and opium users.

She would stand on this terrible corner as the day turned to night, and warmth turned to cold, and ordinary street peddlers turned to threats in the dark.

A terrible desperation seized Flossie's chest, as if Johnny had stabbed her without drawing blood.

Could she go back and pretend this had never happened? Was it possible just to rejoin the wedding party? What explanation would she give? It was too late to pretend that a sick headache had prevented her from going down the aisle. And she had torn her gown. Her hair was ruined, her flowers abandoned. And by now the wedding was over. There was nothing to rejoin.

Oh, Johnny! I loved you! I was going to live with you. Your family would have been my family; your church would have been my church; your life, my life.

Her tears were hot and useless.

He had not come.

Flossie thought longingly of the grave. Only death seemed a possibility now.

"Get a grip on yourself, Dev," said Tod.

He was not treating her like a lady! He was treating her like—like—Devonny could not even say! Was this how men treated each other? This irritated refusal to help?

Since rescuing her from the seat belt, he had walked her through his terrifying house, demonstrating. How could anyone feel at home among so much machinery? It was like living in a factory. A tall glass box chewed food, handheld guns blew wind into the hair, a window box hummed while a dish circled inside, a large white box shuddered and groaned while throwing water over dishes, and most horrifying of all, a box of pictures talked by itself, while people who could not be seen laughed steadily.

"Here, siddown," said Tod. His speech was appalling. Slangy abbreviated orders. "We're gonna E-mail Annie, see if we can find out where Strat is. E-mail," he explained, "is kind of like your telegram, but you do it at home, and it has a different kind of address."

She was all right in the house as long as Tod did not leave her side, but he did not comprehend this and persisted in assuming that she would be fine on her own.

She could hardly wait till Tod's mother arrived. A woman to cling to.

“Don’t say that!” warned Tod. “Women in our family don’t cling. It’s a rule of my mother’s.”

Devonny wanted to cry, but Tod made it clear that women in his family didn’t cry, either. Well, she had seen Annie cry a time or two, but she would not betray Annie to her horrible mean cruel rotten brother.

“We’re in luck,” said Tod, “since my parents are at work. Mom doesn’t go into New York on Saturday if she can help it, but today she had to, and Dad likes to straighten things up in his classroom when nobody’s around, so he’s gone too.”

“For what article is your mother shopping?” asked Devonny.

“She’s not shopping, she’s at work. She’s a stockbroker.”

Devonny was delighted. “I wanted to be a woman of business!” she told Tod. “When I was little, I was permitted to go into Father’s office and play secretary. Just before I was betrothed to Hugh-David, I asked Father for permission to start a telephone business, because I think those instruments will one day be used by all the wealthy, but he forbade me to discuss it.”

“You’re right about phones,” said Tod, smiling, “and used by all the poor, too, and the rest of us in the middle. Maybe your father would let you be a lawyer, though, or a doctor.”

Devonny laughed. “Who would trust a woman pretending to be a lawyer or a doctor?”

“Dev, we have a problem here. My mother will put a knife through you if you talk like that. And never use the word secretary in front of her. It’s a swear word.” He dropped heavily into a chair at a strange shiny desk.

Her father’s office had typewriters, so she half recognized Tod’s typing machine, but he did not use paper. The words came out in front of him on a blue window.

“Tell me what happened today, Dev,” he said. The computer window flashed one picture after another. “How come you didn’t want to marry the guy?”

“You’ll laugh at me,” she said, not wanting to tell.

So of course he did. His laugh was big and raucous, like a tied-up donkey. How vulgar he would sound to Lord Winden, and Gordon, and Miles.

She found herself liking Tod the way she had liked Annie: against her will. “When the man I marry walks into the room, I want my heart to feel

as if John Philip Sousa were directing a hundred marching bands, and all the drums were drumming and all the trumpets calling.”

“No, huh?”

She shook her head. “Hugh-David is just a very well-dressed Englishman who needs pots of money to rebuild his estate.”

“Was,” said Tod. “He’s bound to be dead by now. Whatever happened to him has happened.”

Tod said this in his casual manner, as if it didn’t matter. But it hit Devonny like a slap. Whatever happened to anybody she had ever known had already happened. They were all dead by now. A hundred years had passed. They had had their marriages, their joys, their failures ... and now they had their graves.

The room swayed around her.

Oh, Strat! she thought. You must be here. You must save me. I cannot occupy a world without the people I love ... or even the people I don’t.

“So what about the dowry you told me about? The two million dollars?”

She shook her head. “There was no wedding. The contracts will be null and void. But had we wed, since I was the only living child, when Father died, the rest of the fortune would come to me, too, and my husband would control that. Lord Winden would have had all he could use. And more.”

“You ’re not the only child if Strat comes back,” said Tod. “What happens if we find Strat? Then he’s the heir.”

“I don’t care about the money. There’s enough to go around. I just don’t want to be forced into marriage and sent overseas with somebody who can’t bother to be nice to me.” She lifted her chin a little. “Somebody like you.”

Tod swung in his chair and made a face at her. “Hey, watch who you’re calling mean! I rescued you right at the altar! You called, I came. Women! You can’t please ’em.”

He finished his typewriting. His machine was thin and flat and ran on electricity, as if Tod’s fingers were too weak to depress the letters. She read over his shoulder.

Annie—

Well, now I've been where you've been, and I would never have believed it, but your pal Devonny is here with me. I grabbed her right at the altar just before she said her wedding vows, and I guess the groom is still standing there.

I don't know what to do with her, except bring her home and lie to mom and dad (following in your footsteps). She's looking for her brother Strat she says you took him home with you. Dev says only Strat can solve this. Answer ASAP.

This is a burden I don't need. I got places to go and things to do.

I am the burden he doesn't need, thought Devonny.

The hateful men's clothing, the dreadful humiliating trousers, the terrible exposure of her body, Tod's awful machinery and harsh language, the only woman in the house a creature who would accuse Devonny of swearing if she used the word secretary—well, it was too much.

"Come on," said Tod. He bundled her out of the room, but there was no comfort in his touch. He could have been a policeman dealing with a striking worker. "We've killed most of a perfectly decent Saturday. I got a soccer game and I can't be late, their parents go berserk, as if I'm not reliable and trustworthy. Get in the car."

"The car?" she said fearfully. "But do we not await Annie's answer?"

"You'll get used to the car. I'll teach you to drive. You'll love it. Power. Everybody loves to drive. No, we don't wait for Annie's answer, because I don't know when she's gonna check her E-mail."

He smiled, a softer expression than his grin, and surprised her with a gentle hug, a brotherly hug; she was even more surprised to realize that she would have preferred a different sort of hug altogether.

All the ladies were weeping with fear for Miss Devonny Stratton's reputation and life, so Flossie's father did not object to his wife's tears. But he refused to let her tell about Flossie.

"We will not tell the police she is missing!" hissed Mr. Van Stead. "What are you thinking of? You told me you had her under control. As usual, you have done a very poor job of bringing up our daughters."

“I’m sorry,” she wept. “Flossie has always been sneaky. But we must find her, because the boy is enclosed upon the ship. We cannot have Flossie alone in the city! Think of the dreadful consequences.”

“Flossie will suffer whatever she must suffer. By morning she will be on the doorstep begging forgiveness. In the meantime, we will not have our names dragged into this scandal. Look at the reporters! Look at the laughing guests! Look at Hiram—he’s taken his shoe off, he’s beating the wall with it. He’s going to attack the groom.”

“But perhaps Devonny too had an unsuitable hope. Perhaps there is yet another stonecutter! Surely the girls are together. We cannot have poor Mr. Stratton crazed with fear when we might have the answer at hand. And Devonny’s mother! And the unfortunate groom! We must tell!”

“We have three other daughters to consider. We will solve this on our own. We will not have anything as vulgar as police in our private lives. I forbid you to speak.”

This time Devonny did not flinch when the radio burst into raucous shrieking music. She did not cry out when vehicles swept past each other on the road as if going to war. She told herself she could do nothing until Annie had sent the reply explaining how to reach Strat. This was a temporary hell, and shortly her brother would save her. “Tell me,” she said, “what is soccer?”

The topic made him happy. A soccer smile decorated his face, and for a moment Devonny rather liked Tod. She imagined him running around a field, in the midst of laughing little girls. It was so sweet. They would wear long flowered skirts, possibly even split skirts, with white stockings to cover their ankles.

“My team is sponsored by Laura’s Fabric Shop, so be sure you root for Laura’s. I’m only doing this because I have to, by the way. My mother is making me. The fathers only want to coach boys,” said Tod, “so opening day of soccer season, the program was short of coaches.”

The fathers will volunteer only for their sons, thought Devonny. So one thing has not changed in a hundred years.

The game included a parade of parents and critical observers. Laura’s Fabric Shop was up against Sam’s Garage, a group of six- and seven-year-

olds from another neighborhood. It was immediately clear that Sam's included born athletes: girls who knew where the ball was. Tod's players might just as well have been wandering around Laura's Fabric Shop.

Tod stuck Devonny on the bleachers. Once he looked back at her, huddled and afraid, and he was furious with her, and furious with something else, too, though he wasn't sure what. He knew one thing: No girl on his team was ever going to cringe and shrink like that! He was going to have fighters! "Laura's!" he yelled. "C'mere. We're gonna win this one. I wanna see goals!"

But his little players clumped around the ball, preventing action. They're little, he reminded himself, I've got to be generous, and not yell at them because—

Letitia made a goal.

Tod had never expected such a thing. The girls recognized Tish's achievement and were wildly proud, hopping up and down and running to tell their parents.

Even Devonny was yelling, "Go, Laura's!" just like the parents.

He had to herd his team back on the field, because they had assumed the game was over. They were surprised and a little irritated to find they had to play more. But they loved him, so they tried hard. Tod was surprised and a little irritated to find that he loved them back.

After the game, the little girls shrieked good-bye, and waved, and told their parents—for the hundredth time—"That's Tod, Mommy. Daddy, Daddy, look, there's Tod!"

"Oh, Tod!" cried Devonny as they got back in the car. She clapped her hands together prayer fashion, and stared at him worshipfully. "You were wonderful! The game was wonderful! I was allowed to run like that when I was little."

Normally Tod Lockwood was good at not thinking about things.

When his parents separated last year, he had carefully not thought about it. When his father moved in with Miss Bartten, Tod had thought about it briefly, removed himself, and stopped thinking about it. When he was clearly going to fail Spanish III, he had stopped thinking about it; and when he didn't have enough money for his car insurance, he had stopped

thinking about driving, and instead thought about how to earn money. As each step of selling designer water collapsed, he stopped thinking about that, too, and moved right on to the next attempt.

The key to success was deciding what to think about. Discard the side issues.

Devonny Stratton had just stopped being a side issue.

When she beamed at him, proud of him, and when she bravely did the seat belt by herself, and when she said, "Pass that car, Tod," just like a regular person, who couldn't stand going a mere forty in a twenty-five mile zone, Tod had the most surprising daydream of his life.

Not money. Not power. Not school. Not sports. Not cars.

He wanted to kiss her.

He quickly turned his attention to the traffic. A guy let himself go down that path, he was finished. It was over. Tod was not falling into this trap.

Flossie had stood in one place too long.

She had attracted attention, something a lady without an escort must never do.

Two men sidled up to her. Dirty strangers with dirty fingernails and bad teeth. Depraved. A lady had male relatives to protect her from this.

Flossie did not move. Let them do as they wanted. She was ruined anyway.

"Miss?" said one of them. "You in trouble?"

She could not speak. No doubt this was the usual ploy, pretending to be kind.

"What's wrong, honey?" said the other man.

A street person dared address her in such familiar terms? Her father would have him whipped.

But if she went home, her father would have Flossie whipped. She could not bear it. She could not go home. She could not admit how stupid, how pathetic she had been. She thought of the rosy sunlit days at Devonny's, dancing behind a holly tree, kissing a letter, holding Johnny's cheeks in her hands. He shaved, but not closely, and when she touched him, it rasped her palms and made her shiver from limb to limb.

It had meant nothing.

“You look like you’re gonna jump off the Brooklyn Bridge. You gonna have a baby and no husband? It’s not the end of the world, honey. You go to the shelter for wayward girls, you have the baby and it goes into an orphanage and you have your life back.”

A wayward girl, thought Flossie.

“Come on, we’ll take you to a shelter. They got ’em for girls, you can’t stay on the street.”

She let the men walk her where they chose. In her fragile cloth slippers, it was a terrible journey. It hurt her feet, and hurt her heart. She did not know, and hardly cared, how they might hurt her body.

The pain of Johnny not showing up was so great that more pain hardly mattered. She deserved pain, acting without her parents’ permission.

Whatever these men wish to do to me, she thought, I will submit. Girls must submit, and I have fought the rule.

“Extra, extra!” shouted the newsboys on the corners of New York.

They wore short pants, held up by suspenders. The sleeves of their white shirts were baggy and soft. Their bow ties were soiled and their caps were ancient.

But they sold a lot of newspapers.

BRIDE KIDNAPPED! said the headlines. GROOM OFFERS MILLION-DOLLAR DIAMOND NECKLACE FOR HER SAFE RETURN.

SIX



Gianni Annello had lost all his English.

Not a syllable would come to him. All his hard-earned language, his night classes, his immigrant studies. Gone.

He screamed in Italian. He kicked in Italian. He bludgeoned the door in Italian and then he broke everything in the tiny cabin in Italian.

It did not matter what language he swore in.

He was a prisoner.

On his wedding day, going to his bride. The money for their marriage certificate in his pocket. The slender gold ring for Flossie's finger, sewn by his mother to the inside of his vest ... and he was a prisoner on a boat sailing to Europe.

He wanted to be like his father: a man who could be counted on. Flossie would be alone in New York as night moved in. A girl like that. And he, Gianni Annello, responsible!

Flossie was fragile. She had been cared for all her life and had never done a thing by herself. He thought of the rough edges of this city, and he thought of Flossie, who had never seen them, would not know how to handle them, could be raped or beaten, her clothes and jewels ripped from her slender body.

Once more he attacked the door, and once more the door remained solid against his thrashing.

He prayed: God, let Flossie not have the courage to leave the wedding after all. God, keep Flossie so afraid of her parents that she does not leave the church.

But religion was for women, and if there was a God, God knew that Gianni didn't believe.

Flossie would slip away and run to meet him in the square, for the romance and the danger of eloping had appealed to her fancy.

He hated himself. There truly had been danger, and he, Gianni, had laughed it off.

Flossie must rescue herself, but she was from a world where girls did not. He had not had time to teach her what his mother knew. It was his mother's courage that had picked up a suffering family, taken it to a foreign and terrifying shore, forced husband and sons to learn the English language and the American way. And in this hard hard country, in this hard hard world, Gianni's mother had not only reared her sons, but saved enough money to buy the four-story tenement in which they lived. There was nothing his mother could not face.

But Flossie ...

Hugh-David Winden had read a wonderful book called *Beau Geste*, in which the hero (Beau was his nickname, because he was so handsome; did such a nickname suit Hugh-David also?) gallantly saved his aunt from disgrace by covering up her theft of a valuable gem. To cast suspicion on himself, Beau left England to join the French Foreign Legion and die a grim but brave death in the desert.

Hugh-David was not interested in the French Foreign Legion nor in death, but he wanted to be a hero. Surrounded by ruffians, he felt the need to demonstrate his noble heritage. He did not offer the diamonds for love, but because the gesture made him feel heroic. Or at least, facing in a heroic direction.

Having made the offer, and impressed the entire city, he suddenly wondered how he would face his family, having very possibly given Granny's pebbles to some cutthroat in Manhattan.

Miles and Gordon had drifted away. They could slither between scandals and remain untarnished. He was alone. Because a hero deserved comfort, he moved his belongings into the Waldorf-Astoria, a magnificent hotel he usually enjoyed.

He waited for the police to accomplish something intelligent, although they had not impressed him as capable of that. He found a deck of cards and began a favorite variety of solitaire.

It was not sufficiently absorbing. In his head rang the voice of his bride: I will marry a man with spunk. You are horse manure.

When they got home from soccer practice, Annie's answer was waiting.

Tod—

Wow! How are you going to handle the parents? Tell Devonny Strat did not come with me; I think he's an archaeologist in Egypt, although when I did library research about local history and the Stratton family, I couldn't prove it. Anyway, she's not going to find her brother in this century in our town. Did she actually jilt the guy at the altar? Way cool. Wish I had been there. Will he kill her if she goes home, and will she stay with us forever? I could use a sister. Don't let her leave til I get there.

Devonny clung to Tod, in spite of his yelling at her never to do that. "*Strat is not here?* What shall I do, Tod? I cannot manage without him! He must be here! That's why I came! He must rescue me. And not just me! What about my mother?"

"You came to get away from the wedding," said Tod. "Nobody promised you Strat would be here. And you *have* to manage without him because he *isn't* here. Now stop whining. My mother just drove up, and she doesn't like people who aren't self-sufficient."

Nellie Fish loved her clothing: a simple brown dress, fitted at the waist, with plain long sleeves, and over the dress, a snow-white apron, so heavily starched it could stand up by itself. The apron reached the floor and tied in the back with a wide sash that stood out behind Nellie like a Christmas bow. Buttoned to the waist of the apron was a bib so heavily starched it did not bend, and its straps were wide and crunchy over her shoulders. Buttoned to the wrists of the brown dress were cuffs as rigid as the bib, and buttoned to the neckline was her gleaming white collar, solid with starch. Nellie's posture was vertical and rigid, to prevent any creases in the beautiful stiff starch of her beautiful stiff white uniform.

Her black hair was piled high on her head, stuck with a dozen pins to keep it there, topped by a tiny white ruff that marked her out for the hotel guests as their own personal floor maid.

She was stunned and thrilled to be maid for an English gentleman. A title! Think of it! Nellie had never been close to a celebrity before. It was wonderful. The gentleman's clothing was simply amazing. And when it turned out that this was the very Lord Winden whose bride had vanished from the church during the wedding march ... why, Nellie was the most important person on the staff. Everyone was counting on her to bring back the details and quote the conversations.

Nellie was not going to let them down.

She was eighteen herself, and very pretty. What if her beauty overwhelmed Lord Winden? Perhaps in his hour of need and betrayal, she, Nellie Fish, would fill his heart.

But sadly, when she answered Lord Winden's ring, he was not alone: Another lady and gentleman had arrived. Nellie rolled in a cart for late supper and began arranging the linens and silver and crystal and flowers.

Not one word was spoken by any of the three guests. Nellie knew how to solve this: out of sight, a maid was out of mind.

Nellie bustled into the bathroom to check towels and be sure that the gentleman (because men were not gentlemen in the way they treated their discarded underwear) had not left an unmentionable on the floor, which would shock the lady should she be forced to enter this room.

Sure enough, the three began to talk, and Nellie stood quietly, memorizing each word, as she folded and refolded the towels.

“Why, Tod, darling, I’m so proud of you!” cried his mother. “Of course you may stay with us for a few days, Devonny. How awful to have your host family turn out so rude and difficult. You may have our daughter’s room. Her name is Annie. You can probably wear her clothes, too. She left a completely full closet here even though she shipped a hundred boxes.”

Devonny had a wardrobe like that. She could ship a hundred boxes and still have a full closet. She smiled and tried to maintain her British accent and not inadvertently use a swear word like secretary.

“Whew. Dinner. Let’s go to McDonald’s,” said the mother. “I’m whipped, I can’t look a kitchen in the eye.”

Tod whispered in Devonny’s ear. “Restaurant,” he explained.

Devonny had dined in public. Some of her best memories were the restaurants of Paris. “I shall put on a dress,” she said happily.

“Darling,” said Mrs. Lockwood, ignoring the dress idea, and swooping Devonny and Tod back into the dark and scary car stable.

They drove through fireworks. There were lights everywhere. Inside buildings, words were lit up in red or blue. Huge signs stood by the side of the road, with their own lighting systems. Imagine having reading material stuck up in the air like that.

People’s houses and offices were lighted, the streets were lighted, and most of all, the motorcars were lighted. Devonny had never imagined darkness without the dark. It was beautiful and wonderful. And a beautiful, wonderful thought came to her! Annie believed Strat was alive and well, digging up pharaohs in Egypt! So Annie had done her part—she’d saved Strat. But Strat was not here to do *his* part—saving Devonny.

The restaurant was appalling.

The tables were not set. There were no waiters. People kept their coats on and actually lined up to be given a tray of food, like beggars at the Salvation Army.

Devonny was horrified. Families were bringing children into a situation like this.

She did not recognize the food. She thought of Flossie—was she Mrs. Anello by now?—eating unknown foods with her new Italian family. She thought of Hugh-David, no doubt eating alone in his hotel room rather than facing the world that had seen him jilted; she thought of her mother—

My mother, thought Devonny Stratton. *My mother.*

She looked at Tod’s mother, striding around, knowing what to do. Devonny’s mother had never taken a step like that. Aurelia Stratton had never known what to do. The one step Aurelia took—threatening Hiram Stratton—had been the most stupid and dangerous of her life.

Devonny was not sure she loved a mother who could connive a hard fate for a daughter, and yet Devonny loved her mother completely. She forgave her without needing facts. This was her mother, and Devonny could not let Mama suffer.

I am caught here in this dreadful public place, thought Devonny, and where is my mother, and what can I do to save her from Father's wrath?

I can do nothing.

Tod grabbed a tray overflowing with packages but not food. He elbowed Devonny toward a tiny pretend table.

How much time had gone by on Devonny's wedding day? What was happening in New York at this very moment, a hundred years ago? Was Father punishing Mama? Was he using a physical method? He had been known to use his riding whip. He had used his belt on Strat often enough.

Mama could not endure such a thing. She was frail.

I am a prisoner as much as Mama, thought Devonny. She, nailed into the coffin of an attic, and I, shut into another century, where women must stand alone.

She fought tears while Tod unwrapped the packages. Sandwiches for dinner! How vulgar. Another package had little gold sticks, which Mrs. Lockwood salted heavily and began chewing on, one at a time. She used her fingers.

Devonny felt ill. A woman who considered secretary a swear word would eat dinner with her bare fingers?

Nobody had a fork. What had become of this country?

But she was terribly hungry. Desperately she gripped the huge round thing in both hands and chomped down like Tod. Onion and salad dressing and lettuce spurted onto her fingers. She stayed brave, continued to hold the sandwich and finished her bite.

"Why, that's wonderful," she said, astonished, staring down at the interior of the sandwich. "What are these called?" she said, forgetting she was English and should know these things.

"Darling," said Mrs. Lockwood, "you must live in a very rural area in England. Tell me all about it. Do you go to pubs and have shepherd's pie or do you stay home and have a joint of mutton?"

Devonny took another bite to give herself a little time to think. After all, everybody else was talking with a full mouth. Clearly, in this century people were barbarians. "We live in a castle," she said. "It's called Winden."

"Come on," said Mrs. Lockwood, laughing.

"She thinks you're kidding," interpreted Tod.

“No, no. The castle has two hundred rooms and is in desperate need of a new slate roof. We huddle in one corner, it’s the only spot with heat and a bathroom.” Devonny went on and on, quoting Hugh-David. The British accent began to feel familiar and pleasant. Mrs. Lockwood’s fascination was delightful. Devonny felt like a social success. Even Tod was smiling. She finished her strange sandwich and wiped her lips. Papering her mouth, however, was not the worst moment of the dining experience. They had to clear their own table, as if they were scullery maids.

People paid money to eat here like this, thought Devonny.

She would not stoop to their level.

“Mrs. Lockwood,” she said, inclining her head in a gracious bow, “I thank you for a lovely evening. I am most refreshed.” She turned to Tod. She had a smile in her repertoire that men never failed to return. Indeed, Tod warmed under the sunlight of her smile, and returned it. “I am grateful for your rescue,” she said, putting her hand lightly over his. “Your kindness overwhelms me. And how proud I was to witness your triumph on the soccer field.”

Tod Lockwood fell in love.

He could feel it coming and tried to dodge. Love had such a sharp point that for a moment he believed in Cupid, complete with arrow. He actually ducked under the tiny table, pretending to retrieve a bunch of paper napkins, but he was trying to escape Devonny’s smile.

No, he said to Love. Not for me. I don’t have time. I’m not interested. Get out of here! Beat it!

He composed himself, straightened up and avoided looking at Devonny.

But it no longer took eyes to know that Devonny was there. He could feel her without touching her. Know her without focusing on her.

She was proud to witness my triumph, he thought.

A thousand other opportunities to triumph in front of Devonny Stratton invaded his imagination.

He felt his body heating up, his face changing color, his mind losing track.

Mrs. Van Stead had torn her handkerchief apart. The hem had come out quite easily, and then the lace, and now she shredded the linen thread by thread. Her lap was full of white debris.

Since it was her fault that Flossie had misbehaved, Mrs. Van Stead must whisper the ugly truth to Lord Winden. "Sir, another dread event occurred at the church. We think it best to confer."

Lord Winden shuffled his pack of cards in a noisy slapping manner. He could hardly control his irritation.

Mrs. Van Stead was accustomed to that in a man and she hurried on. "Our daughter Flossie fell in love with one of the Italian workmen putting in the stone walls and the fountain on the Stratton's estate in the country. We intercepted notes between our daughter and the boy. They had hopes of eloping."

The man actually smiled. "Ah, yes," he said casually, as if this did not matter, as if it were not the most awful thing to happen to a well-brought-up girl. "I remember how she would circle the bushes, as if we had not eyes to see, while the young man would ogle and flirt."

Mrs. Van Stead paled. "It was visible to all?"

"It was visible to me," said Lord Winden, shaking his head at the stupidity of young lovers. "What has that to do with my situation?"

Her husband acquired a voice. Mrs. Van Stead was greatly relieved. Men handled things so much better. "Naturally I had the boy rounded up and escorted to the hold of a ship I own," said Mr. Van Stead. "He will be taken back to Europe, although I would prefer to have him thrown off the ship while it is at sea."

"Clever of you," said Lord Winden.

"Today, before entering my pew," said Mrs. Van Stead, bowing her head over her lap of lint, "I personally checked my daughter's gown, hem, gloves and flowers. At fifteen minutes before the hour, my daughter stood with the other bridesmaids, awaiting the wedding procession. *But she did not come down the aisle.* Devonny is missing—and so is Flossie."

"I am so sorry," said Lord Winden.

"Had we but known Flossie planned to leave during the wedding and go to meet the boy, we would have restrained her," said Mr. Van Stead. "My wife is completely responsible for this laxity of supervision."

"Aha," said Lord Winden. He cut his deck of cards.

Mr. Van Stead saw that Lord Winden did not think very clearly, so he said, "I assume that Devonny has done the same, and also went to meet her Italian stonecutter."

The Englishman grasped the situation at last.

Nellie Fish stormed out of the bathroom, crisp apron flouncing. "Criminal!" she shouted at Mr. Van Stead. She shook her finger at him. "Evil man! Beast!"

They gaped at Nellie Fish.

"You kidnapped an innocent boy because your daughter wrote love letters to him?" shouted Nellie Fish. "I thought you were gentlemen! You are horrible terrible people. You do not deserve this dinner."

Nellie Fish flung the table on its side. Gravy splashed on the floor. A silver fork narrowly missed Mrs. Van Stead. Crystal smashed against the brocaded wall. Pastry filling clung to a lampshade.

"*You* will stay here," commanded Nellie Fish. "*I* will summon the law."

She sailed from the room, as much starch in her spine as in her apron.

For a moment, it seemed reasonable to go after the silly woman and throw *her* into the hold of a ship, but even the Van Steads sensed that this was a bad plan.

Hugh-David was swamped with rage.

The woman with whom he had planned to share his life! his title! his castle! his bloodlines!—this woman ran away on their wedding day to some low-class, stone-dusted immigrant?

He had offered the diamonds as a reward, trusting that Devonny had been kidnapped, and all along she had meant what she said on the veranda: I would not marry you if you were the last man on earth.

He, Winden, would get this Italian and torture the truth out of him. "Show me this ship! We must force the boy to tell us where the girls expected to meet him. We will then pick the girls up. I shall return Miss Stratton to her father, who knows the true meaning of the word punishment."

“Don’t hurt the boy,” whimpered Mrs. Van Stead. She did not care about Gianni’s fate, but what with hotel staff summoning police, perhaps murder or mutilation should not be added to their activities.

“All right, my dear. When I kill him, I shall do it swiftly so he feels no pain.” Her husband glared at her. “Of course I’m going to hurt him! Defiling my daughter?”

Mr. Van Stead and Lord Winden stalked out of the hotel, even as Nellie struggled to find somebody, anybody at all, who believed her ... even as Nellie was finding that yes, everybody believed her, gentlemen did that kind of thing, but nobody was going to take action. Did Nellie seriously believe the police would bother an English lord over some useless Italian going back where he belonged?

“Cab!” shouted Mr. Van Stead. A covered horse-drawn carriage pulled right up. The door was flung open for them, and the driver given his directions to the dockside.

Mrs. Van Stead sat awkwardly in a stranger’s hotel room, staring at the china and silver upon the floor. She felt quite faint. Would it be proper to nibble on one of the pastries that had landed in a relatively clean position?

Flossie Van Stead recognized her surroundings. The men had walked her uptown, close to the train station. Why, whenever she visited the country, she took the train from Grand Central. She could take the train to Johnny’s town in Connecticut only a few miles from the Strattons’ seaside mansion.

Did she have the courage?

If Johnny had never had plans to wed Flossie, the Annellos would not even know her name. She would be a demented woman on their doorstep, making demented claims.

And what if Johnny himself was there, having dinner? Would she stand bedraggled and red-eyed on the stairs while he led the laughter?

But if she went to her own home, she would not be greeted by laughter. She could not begin to imagine what her father would do. She had never worried about this, because she had expected Johnny and all his kin to be at her side.

I have been such a fool, she thought dully.

And yet ... and yet ...

Surely it had been true love! Surely Johnny had meant to come! Surely when he talked of their lives together, the children they would have, the joy they would share ...

But what excuse ...?

No, there could be no excuse. She just wanted him to have an excuse.

I must find out. I must face him. I must hear from his lips that this was a joke. How can I go to his family? thought Flossie. But how can I go to mine?

She had halted, and when at last she came to herself, she found her two escorts regarding her sadly. One of them patted her on the back, and the warmth and pressure of his touch brought her again to tears.

How could I have been afraid of them, she thought, when they are afraid for me?

She said to this rough pair, "Could you possibly lend me the fare for the train? I have friends to whom I can go."

The two men searched their pockets and wallets, uncertainly and with long exchanges between themselves.

They had no money. "I'm sorry," she said, sick at her lack of manners. "I shouldn't have asked."

They shrugged. Between them, counting carefully, they came up with train fare. They put the coins neatly in her palm, and her eyes overflowed. They had given her, quite literally, their last pennies.

For me, thought Flossie, a stranger, they will go without dinner, and perhaps their children, too, will go without dinner.

What beauty there was in the simple kindness of strangers. And she saw that in their ugly clothes, behind their dirty fingernails, they were heroes. Heroes whose names she did not know, and whose address she did not have.

"I promise to pay you back. Write down your addresses for me," she said.

They were oddly embarrassed. It dawned on her that they could not write. Might not have addresses.

They shook their heads and said not to worry about them. They asked God's blessing upon her journey. They took her to the right train and told the conductor to look out for her.

The train sped through the darkness, while Flossie Van Stead found light.

Whether or not Johnny loved her, she knew now that there was another direction in life. She, too, could be kind to strangers. She could do what those women starting settlement houses were doing—helping the poor. Flossie and her friends had laughed at such ladies: how ridiculous to spend perfectly good money helping immigrants.

But now she had been lost, penniless and deeply afraid.

I will not be a silly girl anymore, she thought. I will be a woman, and I will honor what these men have done.

On the way home from McDonald's, Tod's mother said, "Stop at the library, Tod." To Devonny she explained, "I read by the armload. The greatest disaster is to run out of library books. We'll just dash in, dash out."

"Not true," said Tod, "it takes her half an hour. We'll go in, too, Dev. I need to do a little research myself."

Devonny had been asked to contribute to the new public library being erected in New York City, but had not. It was such a peculiar idea. A library intended for all New York City? There weren't enough people who knew how to read. Lower-class people didn't need books.

Yet one of her father's colleagues, Mr. Carnegie, was building libraries in every small town in America. The man was amazing in his dedication to books.

When the Lockwoods and Devonny entered the town library, Devonny expected to see a few shelves of darkly bound books by boring writers. She was stunned at the immense space. And on those shelves! Beautiful books! whole floors of books! books for babies and small children and people who gardened and people who traveled! There was a room for studying and a room for journals, and these rooms had the air of a men's club (although she had never been in one) with comfy big chairs sprawled around for silent thought and uninterrupted reading.

She was even more stunned to find a huge and wonderful music room with a bronze plaque over the door: GIANNI ANNELLO ROOM.

Flossie's Johnny? she thought. Her hair prickled. Her skin shivered with gooseflesh.

If I stay here, I will miss my life. I will not know if Flossie married this Gianni, if they had children, if those children honored their father with this plaque. I will not know. I will not see or laugh or dine with Flossie.

If I stay here, terrible things will happen to my mother. Father promised to destroy the letter writer, and I agreed that it should be done. He will relish the task. He will omit no pain or suffering.

Devonny wandered past a section called murder mysteries. Back home, there was nothing she enjoyed more than a good murder story.

It crossed her mind that nobody in her own time knew what had happened to her. Nobody could. Nobody would.

No trace of Devonny would turn up. No body. No ransom would be asked. No news of her marriage to another would arrive.

What if people thought it was murder? What if people said Devonny was on the bottom of the East River, cement weighting her ankles?

Who would be accused of this deed? Whatever weakling stood closest.

Mama.

Devonny stared around the unfamiliar building, with its incredible number of reading materials, and the astounding number of men, women and children using them. It was difficult to breathe or think. Mama—accused of murder!

She would be hanged.

Only my return can save Mama, thought Devonny. There is no Strat to save either of us. I must get home. I must cross Time again. It will be too late to pacify Father by marrying Lord Winden. Hugh-David will be long gone; he will be England-bound, correct in his assumptions about America: brutality and ruffians and violence and stupidity and bad manners.

I can save Mama from her fate, but I cannot save myself. I will have no explanation for what I did or where I have been. Father will shut me away just as he said he would.

It was a terrible choice.

For if she returned to her own Time, she would not return to the life she had led there, for she had destroyed it. But if she stayed here, and created a

new life, in this Time, with these people, her mother would suffer a hideous end.

Gianni's mother spoke no English, and Flossie no Italian.

Mrs. Anello was short and fat, as gray as a great-grandmother. She pushed Flossie into a chair, taking off the ruined slippers, bathing her feet and preparing hot-water bottles. Flossie's decision to be a grown-up dissolved the moment she was treated as a child. She sobbed without stopping, while the Anellos kept saying, "Gianni? Gianni?" Flossie held up her hands in a universal shrug.

Mrs. Anello gave her something even more universal: a welcome. As if she were a daughter ... a daughter who was expected.

At last a cousin arrived whose English was perfect. Flossie gripped Mrs. Anello's hands and told her saga to the cousin. "He just didn't come," she finished. "I waited and waited, and cried, and it was dark, and I could not go home, and I had to believe that Johnny meant to come. Then two strangers came over to me. They were badly shaven, their beards in need of trim, their collars filthy. I was so afraid of them, but they said they would take me to a shelter. And then I thought of just coming to you. I had no money for train fare. They pooled their coins, and put me on the right train, and made me promise that just because my lover did not appear, I would not jump off a bridge or hurt myself. They cared about me."

"We care about you," said the cousin stoutly, and Flossie wept even harder and said, "But where is Gianni?"

Where indeed?

Tod drifted away from his mother and Devonny to locate the reference librarian. "I need to know how much inflation has taken place since 1898, please," he said.

The librarian tracked it down speedily. "Multiply by thirty-three," she said, and moved off to help another patron.

Thirty-three times two million dollars was sixty-six million dollars. That was what Devonny Stratton would have brought to Lord Hugh-David Winden.

Wow, thought Tod. Bet he's pissed.

At the front desk of the great hotel, a telegram had been received and was awaiting the return of Lord Winden.

DO NOT OFFER HEIRLOOM NECKLACE TO AMERICAN PUBLIC STOP I WILL BE ON NEXT BOAT STOP
DO NOT ASSOCIATE WITH STRATTON FAMILY STOP CANNOT FATHOM YOUR CHILDISH BEHAVIOR
STOP MOTHER

SEVEN



*H*ugh-David did not travel far from the trusted path, and that included the trusted roads of New York or London. He would never have entered a neighborhood in which he would not entertain.

The streetlamps which graced the nice side of town did not exist near the docks. No one had shoveled the horse manure from the roads. Rats and starving dogs competed for garbage. A miasma of damp stinking air settled over the carriage. Groups of men rustled half seen and half sensed in black corners.

They could not find the ship.

Warehouses, huge and sprawling, ran on block after block. Immense stacks of enormous crates blocked the way. Wharf after wharf lay empty, or its space was filled with a garbage scow or a coal tub. Watchmen yelled at them and beggars howled threats.

We are fools, thought Hugh-David. These people live in shacks or in the street, with no money, no food and no hope. These men I can only half see, they're wild unfed packs of dogs, and I with the chain of my pocket watch glittering gold in the night.

At last, at last, the ship that belonged to Mr. Van Stead! An ugly graceless heap. Its gangplank was drawn. They had to stand on the edge of the dock, while the filthy water slapped against the pilings, and shout through their cupped hands to get attention. Nobody believed the owner could be here.

They were inspected by the dim light of a kerosene lamp held grudgingly by louse-ridden deckhands.

Looking at the men he had hired, Hugh-David had to wonder if Mr. Van Stead was wise to admit being the owner.

Finally they were permitted on board.

In the yellow failing glow of that lantern, they walked on decks that tilted as if eager to endanger their balance.

It was far into the night before Hugh-David Winden and Elmer Van Stead finally saw Gianni Anello face-to-face.

Into the captain's cabin—mattress smelling of mildew, clothing bundled into corners without first being washed, a basin for shaving that had not been rinsed out in many months—a young man was brought.

Yes. It was the boy from the stonecutters' crew. And he had definitely intended to meet Flossie. He was not wearing the overalls, work shirt and boots of his daily life, but a dark suit, shiny with age, pitifully out of style, perhaps loaned him by a relative from another generation. It was torn now, stained from his imprisonment, but still a suit in which a man might get married.

Hugh-David waited while Mr. Van Stead screamed at Gianni. Mr. Van Stead had a long list of names to call Gianni Anello. He did not get far.

Nobody had expected Gianni to scream back. Gianni Anello leaped upon Elmer Van Stead, grabbing him by the neck. The celluloid collar came off in his hands. Gianni threw it aside and gripped the lapels instead, lifting Mr. Van Stead to his toes. Gianni's unshaven face was two inches from Mr. Van Stead's sculptured mustache. Muscles that lifted stone lifted a man without trouble.

It was not Gianni who risked being thrown overboard.

"You stopped me," said Gianni Anello, "without stopping her? You do not know where Flossie is? It is night, and she is out there alone?"

"It is your fault," blustered Mr. Van Stead. He had no hope of freeing himself.

"It is yours," said Gianni Anello, "and if anything has happened to my bride, I get you for it."

"I suppose you think you could call the law upon me," said Mr. Van Stead.

"I suppose that you will find a knife through your ribs, and it will be mine."

Hugh-David loved threats, and often made them himself. But he never followed through, and nobody ever thought he would. Gianni, however, was not making a threat. This was a statement.

Elmer Van Stead knew it, and when Gianni released his jacket, Flossie's father backed away, breathing hard and pretending not to.

"You just wanted Flossie's money," said Hugh-David, trying to gain control of the situation.

Gianni Anello stared at him. "No," said Gianni. "That was you marrying for money."

Hugh-David flushed. He could not believe he was being put in his place by some immigrant. He rallied. He had intended to torture the truth out of this weakling. Clearly, another approach was called for. "We came because my bride is also missing. Miss Devonny Stratton. She vanished when Flossie did, during the wedding march at the church. There is a claim that she was kidnapped, but when we found that you were involved, we thought you would know Miss Devonny's plans as well as Miss Flossie's."

In the dim light, Gianni looked shocked. "I know nothing," he said. The rough threatening voice was gone, replaced by anxiety. "I do not believe she had such plans," said Gianni, sounding young. "The only plan was for Flossie. They were so excited about it, the girls. It seemed to them full of romance and danger."

Lord Winden stared at the boy. "Then—she did not have—She was not interested—There was no young man—"

"No, sir. She spoke of the wedding vows she would take, and how they frightened her, but she was brave. Her father had made a threat to her, which she would not reveal."

It came to Hugh-David again that he was not the one who had insisted on having the wedding so speedily.

"What was this claim of kidnap?" said Gianni Anello.

"Mr. Stratton received a letter," said Hugh-David. He imagined the worst: savage curs who wanted a ransom and, until they received it, would hurt a beautiful young girl in every way there was to hurt. He imagined the best: that he had been jilted, and that Devonny was happy on her wedding night, but not with him.

There was space in his heart for horror: He would prefer Devonny caught in the terror of kidnap than safe in the arms of love.

I am not a gentleman, he thought.

"You have wasted time," said the boy to Flossie's father. "You have wasted this entire night. Even now you waste time. You are not looking for

her.” Gianni opened the cabin door and strode out. “Where have you searched so far?” he demanded. They had no choice but to follow him. No choice but to admit that they had not really looked anywhere.

“Flossie is not first for you?” demanded Gianni. “You, her father?”

They had reached the deck, where the gangplank had been pulled back, and only the huge ropes attached the ship to the pier.

How restless was the night. Waves splashed, flags slapped, docks shifted, ropes creaked. Unless they were other noises—the gathering of gangs, the sharpening of knives, a bullet slid into the chamber of a pistol.

“Then—then where is Devonny now?” cried Hugh-David.

With the deckhands, Gianni maneuvered the gangplank back into position. “I would listen to the kidnapper, Mr. Winden.”

“It is very dangerous here,” said the captain. “The area is full of cutthroats. You must remain safely on board till morning. You are lucky you survived getting here.”

Hugh-David shivered. On a cold and vicious night, some cold and vicious person possessed Devonny. And he, her intended husband? How cold and vicious was he?

Was she afraid? Hungry? In pain? Did she hate him? Did she pray that he would come for her? Or did she know that Hugh-David was no hero, merely a man who pretended to give away diamonds?

“You must have quarters where we can sit in comfort, then, man,” demanded Mr. Van Stead. “Take us there.”

“Comfort?” said the captain. “On this ship?”

“Comfort!” said Gianni Anello. “You dare to think of your comfort? The father of a girl missing at night? My children will never know that you are their grandfather. I will not shame them with that.” He went down the narrow wooden bridge and disappeared into the night.

On Monday, although Tod did not feel that Devonny was ready for high school, or that high school was ready for Devonny, he inspected her clothing, made her change out of a dress and into cords, shirt and pullover sweater, and put her in the huge old station wagon.

“Now we’ll have to have another story for school,” he said. “I don’t know what we’re going to do when the home story and the school story

cross, but mostly my parents are too busy to check on things and mostly the school doesn't get around to it, either. So you're my cousin Devonny and you're here for a week, and you'll go to my classes. Don't say anything stupid."

"Saying stupid things is your role," said Devonny.

He grinned. Back home, Devonny thought, an insult had an effect: A cad tried to behave as a gentleman. Tod just enjoyed being insulted.

In school, however, she found that saying stupid things was universal. Who would dream that young gentlemen *and* young ladies would have foul mouths? Would shout rudely in front of their betters? And constantly talk back to their teachers!?

If Tod had disapproved of her clinging habit in his own house, it was clear that in school, should she cling to him, he would sever her hand from her wrist.

Students yelled and took quizzes and passed in papers and argued and gave excuses and turned on computers that spat out reams of information, and then the students leaped to their feet and charged down a hallway to do this again in another room.

In each room, an introduction of Devonny, a round of applause; a seat was found, a textbook shared. She had never encountered such complete friendliness. All of it was slightly rude. Many people said how sorry they were for Devonny, related by blood to Tod Lockwood.

But the clothing girls put on their bodies! The homeless of New York in 1898 did not wear the torn layers and hanging drooping shirts of the average girl in Tod's day.

Two girls asked if she wanted to go with them after school to McDonald's. The students seemed to regard McDonald's as a club. She was touched, in a horrified way. But she did not want these girls for her friends. She wanted Flossie, and Gertrude, and Ethel. She wanted Harriett, who was dead, who had died so young from bad lungs.

But I am dead to my world, too, she thought, for they shall never see me again.

She was a ship without a rudder, doomed to drift on the sea of this harsh and demanding time.

Harriett had stepped forever through Time, and into Death. Could she, Devonny, step back? What threshold could she use to step back in Time?

She knew of none.

She let go, knowing herself a prisoner, and worked hard to do precisely what everybody else did, for it was her only hope: that she could fit into this Time instead of her own.

By the end of the day, Tod had been suspended from high school. Devonny was shocked to find that she, too, had been bad. "You didn't tell me it was wrong!" she yelled at him on the way home.

"Come on, Dev, how many squirt gun wars did you ever have in your living room?"

"Everything here is so ridiculous that I thought you probably did use the school auditorium for squirt gun wars."

"You had great aim, Dev. I loved how you went after the cheerleaders."

"They shouldn't paint their faces like that. I enjoyed soaking their hair." Tod laughed so hard he nearly drove the station wagon off the road.

Devonny grabbed the wheel and corrected his aim. "And staying home tomorrow is to be a punishment? In my day, if you disobeyed your elders, you would suffer a real punishment. You would be whipped, or confined to a cellar, or if you had my father for a father, you would be confined to an asylum." For the first time, something about Strat's torture was funny.

"I must say that a person who sells squirt guns in school in order to market his designer water ought to be confined to a lunatic asylum."

Tod was indignant. "It was a great idea."

"You lost money on the water pistols."

"Well, nobody would pay me any more than I paid at the discount store. But I really did expect to make money on the water. I explained to everybody that the squirt guns worked only with Stratton Point Spring Water."

But his classmates had filled their pistols at the water fountains, and then had a squirt gun war in the auditorium on the day the state safety inspector was there.

This had not proved profitable in any way.

Tod stopped laughing after a while and made it home, and once they were inside the Lockwood house, Devonny was surprised by the silence. The family always had a television, radio, fax, phone, dishwasher, computer, or conversation going, or all at once, while they were doing

whatever drudgery was necessary to keep their difficult lives moving along.

Tod fixed her a snack. He didn't work very hard at it. He opened a bag of potato chips, with which Devonny had fallen in love during school lunch, and they sat down together in front of what Tod said was a soap opera. Nobody sang and there was no soap.

Tod took her hand.

His hand was square and plain. It was scraped up from the last soccer practice, cut deep from sloppy technique in woodworking class, chapped red from his refusal to wear gloves.

She thought of Lord Winden, whose manicured fingers had held a horse's reins, or a fine fountain pen, but which would never scrape a dirty dish or change oil in a car.

"I'm glad you're here, Dev," said Tod. His hand had not entirely closed on hers, as if he needed permission for an actual squeeze.

Devonny Stratton did not hear a marching band. There were no cymbals. But if she faced in Tod's direction for a week, or a year, would she hear them?

Every instrument in joyful harmony? Would she fall in love with Tod Lockwood?

Had she crossed Time in order to meet Tod? Was he the reason? What great force, what incredible strength, could have ripped her from her own Time and brought her here?

She had taken too long. He panicked, and withdrew his hand, and hastily offered her a Coke, and jumped up to get it, and the moment was over, and she did not know how to get it back.

Hugh-David obtained the names and addresses of the stonecutters from Mr. Stratton's secretary. He sat at his hotel through several days of sleet and snow, but finally the weather cleared and he boarded a train to Connecticut. Here, in the fall, he had spent a delightful month at the Stratton summer estate, its towers glittering against the green sea and the blue sky. The Annellos lived only a few miles from the Mansion, and they too were on the waterfront. But theirs was a black and oily river, bubbling with sewage and dead fish.

He climbed to the third floor. A fat old woman opened the door and looked him up and down without approval. She called for others to come inspect and see whether this stranger should be allowed in.

“Lord Winden!” cried Flossie, darting forward.

“You’re here!” he said, stunned.

“Of course I’m here. Where did you think I would be?”

Dead, he thought. Murdered, raped, thrown into a canal.

“When Gianni didn’t come,” said Flossie, “I knew something terrible had happened, so I came straight to his family.” She beamed at him, as if they were friends; as if he had done good deeds in her presence.

“My family now,” she said proudly. She bowed her head and a flush of joy pinked her cheeks. She looked back up into Hugh-David’s eyes. “We’re married,” she said, as if speaking the most beautiful words on earth.

Hands parted the babbling relatives. Gianni Annello moved forward. He stood behind his bride, wider, taller and stronger. Hugh-David was not sure how to behave. Slowly he extended his hand in congratulation, and slowly Gianni Annello took it. Flossie kissed them both, for now she was a married woman and need not behave so carefully.

“Now you must come in and have something to eat,” she said, “and tell us everything you know about Devonny.”

“I know nothing,” he said.

Flossie cried out. “There has been no clue? No news?”

“Flossie, I continue to hope. I continue to hope that perhaps she left as you did, for a finer embrace than mine. Because if that is not the case, then she is lost to us.” He had not rehearsed that speech. It had come to him as he struggled to look Gianni Annello in the eye.

“You are being very brave,” Flossie told him. “And I know that Devonny is being brave also. She did not seek any other arms than yours. She had promised her father. She would not break a promise.”

They fed him.

Everybody ate, and ate a great deal, and the food was strange and delicious, cheeses and sausage he had not tasted before, and the rooms were hot with people and cooking and friendship. No matter how much they fed him, he felt a queer hunger, and by the end of the meal, he understood. He wanted this love and closeness, this worry and concern, these hugs and this noise: a family.

“I don’t know,” he said to Flossie, “if Devonny would expect anything from me. I don’t know if she prays to hear my step, or if she wants to see me in the door of her rescue.”

“She wants to see anybody at all rescuing her,” said Gianni.

“Promise me you will continue to look for her,” said Flossie. “She intended to repeat her vows: to love, honor, cherish and obey.”

Cherish, thought Hugh-David Winden, and in that moment he knew that nobody had ever cherished him.

“You, sir, must behave as if you, too, had taken those vows. Present or missing, Devonny Stratton is yours,” said Flossie Van Stead Anello. “You must be faithful. You must save her.”

Mrs. Lockwood was prepared to kill Tod for getting suspended, so Tod confused her by talking about how wonderful it would be for a British exchange student to have the splendid opportunity of going into New York City instead of school! Seeing a professional woman at work in a competitive and exciting field! Mom owed it to Devonny, to England, to Anglo-American relations, to take Devonny to work in the morning.

Mom fell for it. Tod thought maybe along with his career in designer water he would become a con artist, because if you could con your own mother in a crunch, you had skill.

Devonny was eager. She would see New York City a hundred years later! She would see if they really did have telephones. She would see what it was like to be a Self-Made Woman.

And she would see if on the right street at the right moment, she could mesh with Time and step back through.

Devonny had a parasol to match every dress. She had petticoats of satin and lace and taffeta. She had white gloves to the elbow, a new pair once a week. She had miles of lace, ruffles and flouncing.

Devonny sorted through Annie’s wardrobe to find something sufficiently dressy for town, but if there was any such thing, Annie had taken it with her to Norway. Annie’s wardrobe consisted of dull dark colors in heavy hard materials, like the overalls of workmen.

Finally Devonny located a long flowered skirt and a blouse so large that nothing was revealed of her actual body, although it did not make her

pretty, either. It was just cloth, and it was there.

“Perfect,” enthused Mrs. Lockwood. “Now, I take the seven-oh-two train, so I will set the alarm for five-thirty.”

In the morning? Yes, servants and cooks and tenders of heating systems got up at such an hour, but *people* didn’t! “That will be fine,” said Devonny, uttering one of her hugest lies.

And at five-thirty in the morning, they leaped from bed, showered, dressed, gulped coffee, rushed to the car, drove to the station, bought a ticket that cost as much as a week’s rent, and finally sat crushed together on a rickety excuse for a train where nobody talked or had any fun but read a morning newspaper.

Devonny was thrilled to read the paper. Her stepmother Florinda was not permitted to read the paper, lest politics and threat of war upset her delicate balance.

They arrived at Grand Central Station (surely it had been much more grand?), took the subway, popped up out of the ground and walked several blocks to Mrs. Lockwood’s office.

The buildings were so tall that Devonny could not think of it. What made them stand up? What if they fell? What if all that glass hit the pavement? How did you climb that many stairs?

But the streets were so clean—no horse droppings—and the cars so obedient to traffic fixtures. It was wonderful, how these people who did not know how to eat knew how to be kind in traffic.

The women had no sense of fashion. Black was the color of choice, or ivory or olive green. Was the nation in mourning? To Devonny’s eye, they were dressing like men. She could not understand this. There were so few advantages to being a woman. Surely magnificent clothing was one, and these women had money of their own, which was most rare, but they were not spending it on clothing. Or if they were, they were making poor choices.

Not a single individual wore white gloves. Devonny could not imagine occupying an urban world and touching it. Why, you would have to wash your hands constantly!

Neither men nor women wore hats. Devonny never left a portion of her body undecorated. Indeed, these people had abandoned the most delightful frothy clothing of all! The only hats to be seen were worn by the more

frightening young men on the street, whose skulls were covered by gaudy knit caps.

Mrs. Lockwood's work took place on the phone and on her computer screen. Devonny could not entirely figure out what she was doing, but it was terribly exciting to Mrs. Lockwood, who forgot Devonny, and shouted into the phone, and took notes, and bit pencils, and handled two telephone calls at once while typing madly at her keyboard and staring at the results on the screen. Devonny was quite out of breath considering it all.

At two o'clock Mrs. Lockwood remembered lunch, opened her briefcase, handed Devonny a sandwich (hard and dry), a tiny round cake wrapped in clear slick paper, and a little box of grapes, so hard to open that the gentleman at the next computer had to break into it for Devonny, and then she spilled it everywhere because the box contained grape juice instead of grapes. How on earth did you keep liquid in a box?

Mrs. Lockwood flung her apparatus down. "Isn't this wonderful, Devonny? I love what I do. I love work. Can you imagine a life with nothing to do except get ready for a party?"

"Shocking," said Devonny, who had done it successfully for years.

Nobody seemed normal here, especially the females. A female must not be curious, assertive or different. She must not want adventure. Even to dream of being like the few brave women in the world (Ida Tarbell the muckraker, Florence Nightingale going to war, Jane Addams starting Hull House) was wrong. Difference in a woman would involve unseemly activities among men.

But all these women were among men, and nobody noticed, especially the men.

Mrs. Lockwood's new assistant was a young woman named Lindsay, who had just had a baby. "Oh, lovely," said Devonny, feeling on solid ground here. "Tell me about your baby."

"It's a girl," Lindsay said. "David had his heart set on a boy. So I'm going to get pregnant again right away."

Devonny looked out the window at a skyline that was so very different, listening to a sentence so very familiar. "Do you feel the same?"

"Well, of course I'm delighted with Ashley, she's so precious, and I wouldn't trade her for anything, but I do want a boy. So we'll keep trying."

Even in Annie's time, thought Devonny, having a girl means try again. Get it right.

Mr. Stratton requested the honor of Lord Winden's presence at his town house for a discussion of the choices now available to them.

Sitting frozen and terrified in the parlor was the first Mrs. Stratton.

Hugh-David bowed. "Madam," he said, "how you must be suffering with anxiety, even as I am."

"Her suffering," said Hiram Stratton, "is nothing compared to what it will be."

Hugh-David raised his eyebrows.

"Aurelia, tell the man what you have done."

Hugh-David moved closer to her, for if he could not be the hero that Flossie expected, at least he could be encouraging to Devonny's mother.

Mrs. Stratton was trying not to sob. "First, sir," she said to Hugh-David, "I shall tell you what Mr. Stratton has done. Perhaps you heard mention of our very dear son, Strat."

"Aurelia!" said Mr. Stratton dangerously.

"I shall tell him all of it or none of it," said Aurelia.

Mr. Stratton shrugged.

Hugh-David felt chilled. Surely this man never shrugged about anything, ever, in this world.

"My husband was very angry with Strat a few years ago because Strat had fallen in love and was full of silly stories about a girl named Annie. She was some sort of tramp and disappeared one day. Strat was deeply upset and said all manner of ridiculous things and argued strenuously with his father and with various household guests. He behaved badly. Arguments escalated. Soon anger between them had reached a fever pitch, and my husband felt he was no longer in control of his child. He took his revenge by pretending Strat was insane."

Hiram Stratton looked amused. He locked his fingers together on his large distended waist and rocked on his heels, contemplating the ceiling.

"He had our son locked up in an asylum to teach him a lesson. The lesson was: Never argue with your parent. Obey. Do not talk back. But

Strat managed to escape, and there was a terrible accident, and my darling boy, my sweet and lovely son, was killed.”

Hugh-David found himself kneeling, holding her cold hand between his. A father so harsh that he pretended the family blood was ruined in order to make a point? No wonder the poor woman’s face was lined with sorrow.

Would Devonny ever have told Hugh-David where and how Strat had died? Would they have reached such a point of trust?

A line of sorrow formed on his own, much younger, face. For he had made it clear to his bride that she was not to waste time trusting him; she was simply a conduit for the money he needed.

“Have no respect for me, sir,” said Mrs. Stratton quietly. “Divorced and unnecessary in life, I was desperately lonely. I was not permitted to visit my children. My allowance was so small I could scarcely afford to leave the house, let alone attend the symphony or the opera. I could not afford the fashions necessary to pay visits or reply to invitations. Eventually, there were no friends and no invitations. My life was dark and cold.”

He, too, hated dark cold corners, and stayed at his club, or traveled, or invited houseguests in order to warm himself by their conversation.

“So I arrived at a decision,” said the mother of Devonny and Strat. “I would blackmail Hiram. In that letter, I would write that if his son had tainted blood, so did his daughter. Were this dread fact to be made public, no man would marry that daughter, lest the children of the marriage also be insane. Hiram believed the threat,” she said, sounding proud of herself for writing such an effective letter. “He seized upon you, Lord Winden. He flung that wedding together in days. His scheme was to put you two on a ship and get you out of the country before this hideous truth became known. While you were getting Devonny with child, he would track down and destroy the blackmailer.”

Hugh-David had thought himself sophisticated; he had thought little would shock him. He was shocked. His own mother, who would manipulate anybody anywhere for any end, might have stopped before doing what Aurelia Stratton had done.

She rushed on with her wicked tale. “I was sure he would never find me out. I was sure that Devonny, given control of her fortune, would bring me to England, and I would be part of the new family! And I would have parties and fashions and friends and joy and music once more!”

Hiram sent the wrong one to the insane asylum, thought Hugh-David. She is insane from poverty. Insane from the loss of her son. "It worked well, Mrs. Stratton. But where is Devonny now? Did you arrange this also?"

The little woman gave him a strange clear look, past grief and fear, as if she had abandoned both her hope and her body.

His anxiety grew huge. It seemed to fill the room, like some noxious air. What had the woman done? What had they all done—he and the father and the mother—in their greed and selfishness?

"I know nothing of what has happened to Devonny," she said. "This has ruined me. My carefully laid plans—someone has destroyed them."

She did not care what had happened to Devonny. She was concerned with her ruined plans.

Oh, Devonny! he thought. No one knows where you are. No friend, and no foe. I too have been an instrument in your suffering. Nor have I accomplished a thing. What park or room or alley am I to search? How to storm the city? Where is the mysterious letter, from which I could divine what cellar or garrett holds you prisoner?

But the days had passed. A kidnapper who did not care about a diamond necklace was not going to write in for a ransom. Hugh-David thought of Aurelia's dark insanity, Hiram's cruel fatherhood, Strat's lonely death, Devonny's unknown fate.

My mother will soon arrive, he thought, and will terrify everybody in sight. Including me.

He remembered telling Devonny she would be fine in England as long as she submitted to everything her mother-in-law said. But nobody was really fine around Hugh-David's mother; in fact, most people related to this woman spent their lives trying to avoid her.

I was going to use my wife to stand between me and my mother, he thought. Use Devonny to soak up my mother's temper and demands and thoughtlessness.

The tally of the ways in which he had planned to abandon Devonny was mounting. His opinion of himself slipped downward in proportion.

He left the splendid building that housed the failed Stratton family, wishing that something as simple as joining the French Foreign Legion

would save Devonny. But that was in books. In life, in the city, on the street, he did not know how to find her.

Nobody came to claim the necklace.

Except his mother.

EIGHT



Mrs. Lockwood came to soccer practice the following Saturday.

It wasn't half so much fun with her there. How could Tod be a big important strong coach when his own mother was pacing around and making suggestions, which in her case were mainly orders? He was just a teenager doing an assigned chore.

"Do we have enough money to buy everybody an ice cream, Mrs. Lockwood?" asked Devonny. "Let's go to the store and get ice cream treats for the whole team."

Mrs. Lockwood thought that was an okay idea. Tod thought it was brilliant, and he smiled at Devonny, a smile that made her think twice about the twentieth century.

Devonny managed several detours to lengthen the errand. She needed to see how the high school game was coming along; she must dart into the pharmacy for lip balm and stop at home to get warmer gloves.

When they got back to the field, Tod and the Laura's Fabric Shop team were huddled around the bench, creating a strategy nobody could do and nobody would remember.

What a father he will be to his daughters, thought Devonny. What a husband he will be to his wife.

She was overwhelmed with wanting to be a good wife and a good mother, and to do these things with a good man.

At home, thought Devonny, men "do." Girls "are." But I'm watching a dozen little girls who not only expect to "do," but are being trained to "do" and love it. They will be like Tod's mother; they will run their team and make their goals.

What do I want?

Do I want to stay here and “do”?

Or do I want to go home and “be”?

She laughed painfully. She had no choice; Time had made it for her. These little girls on Tod’s team: for them, the whole world was a choice. It was frightening to Devonny how much possibility lay ahead of these girls.

Yet they led such hard lives, these people!

They did not commence the day by drawing a serene hot bath, but leaped into a vertical box with a waterfall of water, cleansing in seconds. Then they leaped out and dressed themselves, and was there a hot meal awaiting to break the long fast of night? No. In the kitchen (kitchen! a lady had no place in a kitchen) you made your own (cold) breakfast.

And in class! The amount you were supposed to know!

It was undignified. There was no leisure. There was no elegance.

In Tod’s school, the girls were tough. They whipped each other in sports, they aced exams, they chaired committees, they won science scholarships, they got into superior colleges, they even got into West Point!

They did not cling. They did not demurely await a man’s pleasure. They were not demure.

After school, either they worked at a fast-food place or went there and had the fast food served by friends. Devonny would truly rather be dead than bring other people food or clean up after them.

Then the whole family had to work together to come up with dinner. Devonny herself was made to peel a potato.

Now they wolfed this food down and then sat in front of a television to watch other people talk and sing and dance while they did homework, and then they went to bed with no assistance. No one had freshened the room, nor fluffed the pillows, nor prepared a hot-water bottle, nor filled the bedside carafe with cold water.

The day is going to come when Mrs. Lockwood will insist she has to call my supposed parents in England and tell them how much she loves me and what a fine guest I am, thought Devonny, and what will we do then, when we have to admit there is no family?

Family.

The cold burn of anxiety hit her again.

Oh, Mama, what are you suffering? You have made your terrible bed and must lie in it, and I took one great terrible step across Time and must

accept it also.

“What’s the matter, sweetie?” said Mrs. Lockwood, all concern, all hug. Devonny found herself close to tears. “I feel very alone.”

“It’s difficult to cross an ocean to another country, I’m sure,” agreed Mrs. Lockwood.

If she knew how great the ocean was! “You are so good at doing things by yourself,” said Devonny.

“Everybody here is so good at striding forward alone.”

“Alone?” said Mrs. Lockwood. “I’m not alone. Alone is hard and awful. Nobody wants to be alone. I have made a great sacrifice and many compromises so that I will not be alone, Devonny.”

Devonny did not believe this. “Tod says I’m a weak-minded Victorian who can’t stand on her own feet.”

“Where does he get this Victorian stuff, anyway? He keeps throwing that word around.”

“I cannot imagine,” said Devonny, and she kept her composure by distributing ice cream, while she imagined Victorian stuff: her world, her life, her friends, her family; the fiber of her soul.

There were three towers in the immense brown-shingled summer mansion by the shore. One was splendid, with a telescope and writing table for jotting observations of weather and natural history. It was not frequently used; not since a guest had been shot here last year.

One tower was part of the master bedroom, and Hiram’s fourth wife frequently fled to the sanctuary of that high place. Hiram could not follow, because his bulk was too great for the tiny winding stair.

But the third tower was simply to match and look graceful. It was inconvenient and not used for anything. It was reached by stooping through a low attic.

The carpenters had nailed wood over the windows.

A cot was placed against one cold wall, where the chilly winter wind sifted through the cracks. A chamber pot, a Bible and two blankets had been placed by the cot.

The door had been flimsy, but now was strong, and bolted from the outside.

“You will be fed,” said Hiram, “you who threatened me. But you will not have a life.”

He slammed the door hard, slid the bolt so that it shrieked, smacked a servant who did not get out of his way and smiled to himself. Aurelia was out of his life—and out of her own—as if she had never been.

Downstairs, servants were covering the furniture with white sheets. Silver was packed to be taken back to New York for the winter, while crystal and china were shelved in the butler’s pantry to await the spring. Rugs were rolled up and carried outdoors to be hung on lines and beaten clean. Horses were taken from the stable to board in town until Hiram needed them again next year.

Hiram strode out of doors to consider his view instead of his problems. As usual, the view entertained him not at all, and he was back to his problems.

It had felt good to see those hammers swing and force those nails forever into the window frames; it had felt good to see the fear and resignation of that old shriveled woman who had tried to damage him; but it did not feel good to stand here and know it accomplished nothing.

Nobody had accomplished anything.

His silly wife, Florinda, occupied herself writing letters to everybody they had ever known, especially in California, hoping for a clue to Devonny’s whereabouts.

Police interviewed, scoured, searched, came up empty.

Lord Winden, skittering around with his necklace and his horrifying monster of a mother, was not capable of finding anything.

Flossie, in her new slum with her ridiculous husband, bringing shame upon her family, claimed to have no knowledge.

The police were skeptical that there was a kidnapper. After all, they claimed, Mr. Stratton should be able to supply more detail if such a person had actually penetrated the church and seized his daughter right off his own arm.

The wind rose. A flag snapped as hard as a snare drum.

There was no heat in the tower. It would be a long winter for Aurelia. Possibly she would not survive.

What have my children done to me? thought Hiram Stratton, his golf course and his gardens and his new fountain giving him no pleasure. A

worthless son. A worthless daughter. I shall end up like my colleagues, having to give my fortune to some foolish university or worthless museum!

He had lost his son and now ...

The truth came to Hiram Stratton.

He began laughing.

His laughter rose with the wind, and he knew it would be heard in the tower, for its walls were thin.

The kidnapper, somehow, some way, had been Strat himself! The son who stormed off, pretending death, refusing his heritage, had taken his revenge by taking his sister. Strat had ripped his sister right out of the church.

Hiram was suddenly quite proud of the son he had discarded. The boy has guts, he thought.

He stopped worrying about Devonny. Soon she and her brother would be in touch with him, and they would want money, and he would bargain until he had what he wanted: their marriages and their offspring.

Once more his step was jaunty, and he left for the city, and gave no more thought to the tower and the coming of winter.

Aurelia Stratton accepted her fate. She deserved it. She had done a horrible thing to her daughter. She had had no conscience, just a selfish desire for her own comfort.

This was how a worthless relative was treated. The severely brain-damaged, the grotesquely deformed, the emotionally crippled, the evildoer who belonged in jail but whose jail sentence would bring shame upon the household. Society agreed that such people belonged in the cellar or attic: lock them up, tell nobody they still existed, everybody would pretend they never had, and nobody would be forced to think of them again.

And now one of those people was Aurelia herself.

She heard the roar of laughter from the man who had fathered their two children.

She heard the carriage leave, heard the creak of wheels and the clatter of horses' hooves.

And then there was silence.

Only a few servants occupied the Mansion in winter. She had not seen them when the door was shut upon her.

They would bring her cold food only: there would be no sugar on the oatmeal, no salt on the meat, no drink except water, no butter for the bread, no hot coffee, no comforting soup. She would see no person. Whatever was handed in she would take, and whatever she handed back, empty bowl or full chamber pot, would be carried away. But she would see no sky, hear no person speak, have nothing to think about but her own failures.

She had slipped a note to the coachman. She could not include a bribe. She wondered if the note would be given to Hiram. Or had it already been given to him, and that was why he howled with laughter?

“We most certainly will not!” shouted Hugh-David’s mother.

Hugh-David winced. Really, he had been upset with the rude bellowing of Americans, but his mother could bellow as loudly as any New Yorker.

“I believe I must,” he said, trying to hold his ground.

“The woman is immoral. Evil. Disgusting. I am deeply disappointed in your silliness! Throw that note away immediately and stop whimpering over it.”

Hugh-David did not think he had been whimpering. He had been considering. Considering a girl who once said that he had no spunk.

“Just what do you think you will do with the woman once you rescue her?” shouted his mother.

“I don’t know,” he admitted.

“Well, come up with something before you embark upon a ludicrous and unlawful excursion!”

Hugh-David yearned to nail his mother in a frigid attic. What pleasure there would be as he walked away. He reminded himself that he was not a barbarian, and must honor his mother.

This was a dreadful thought. The woman was bound to live for decades.

He said, “I am concerned that Aurelia Stratton might take her own life.”

“What difference would that make?” demanded his mother. “Her life is as good as gone anyway. It will save everyone a deal of trouble.”

He took a deep breath. With his mother around, his lungs got as much exercise as if he had taken up rowing. "I do not think she did enough to deserve such a fate, Mother," he said, "and I do not think Devonny would wish to see her suffer. Certainly Devonny would not wish to see her die by her own hand. Devonny has a good heart. She would wish her mother's happiness and prosperity."

"A good heart?" shouted the Duchess. "A wench who runs away from her own wedding?"

"I cannot find or save my bride, but at least I can save her mother," said Hugh-David. "A gentleman does not abandon a lady." This was his new credo, difficult to remember when his mother was there. Some people deserved abandonment.

"Pshaw!" shouted the Duchess. "She abandoned you!"

His mother meant Devonny. "I don't think so, Mama. I think Hiram Stratton set this up. I understand nothing, but I will wait this out."

"What might you mean by that stupid remark? Do you plan to wait a month? A year? A decade? Come to your senses. You're like your father. Your blood is thin."

He studied his mother as she ranted and raved about Granny's pebbles, which he had put at risk, and his duty, which he was failing, and America, which was annoying, and what should she wear to the party tonight in order to look better than anybody else.

Devonny's blood could be no worse than his own.

He opened the sad little scrawl from Devonny's mother and read it again.

"Let's drive down to Stratton Point, Tod," said Devonny. Gianni Anello has a music room named for him, and we have a town beach and park named for us, she thought. Did we become friends? Of course we didn't. I'm not there.

She had been deeply anxious all day, and now anxiety ruled her body. She could not eat, she could not look at the television, she could not go for a run with Tod's mother (a woman past her prime, a woman over forty, running up and down like a street boy!).

Devonny thought of her own mother, and a horrible sensation attacked her body. She felt the attic. The splinters on the wall pierced her hand. She trembled in the total dark. The lonely silence gnawed the edges of her sanity.

Tod was always willing to go for a drive, and he did have to obtain more designer water from the pump, so off to Stratton Point they went.

Devonny clung to the seat belt that had once frightened her so. How eerie to drive on paved roads where there had been a dirt path, to pass parking lots where there had been meadow, and—most awful—gaze up at a hill on which there was nothing but grass. A hundred years ago, she had danced in a ballroom there.

Her life was cut to the ground, not a trace remaining except the old red pump where the spring never ran dry.

“I’m going to teach you how to drive while we’re here,” said Tod. “There’s nobody around except joggers and runners, and nobody needs them anyway; we’ll just mow ’em down. You get extra points.”

Devonny was used to this talk now. In Tod’s Time, nobody meant anything by their threats, whereas in her Time, when Father threatened a person with being chained up ... it happened.

She said, “I like having a chauffeur. You drive and I’ll look out the window.”

So he drove, and she looked out the window.

At the top of that graceful hill, a hundred years ago or perhaps now, her mother was afraid, alone and cold.

Tod had the excellent heater of the big old station wagon blasting; he himself was wearing a short-sleeved T-shirt. Yet Devonny felt the cruel wind slip beneath the shingles, cut through the blankets and lay frost upon her skin.

“Tonight Mom is taking us shopping,” said Tod. “She says you have to have jeans that fit.”

They are refitting me so that I am part of their Time. I should thank Tod, and love him forever, but I want to go home.

“Pretty soon we’re going to have to explain why you don’t have any family sending you spending money. I haven’t thought of an explanation. Have you?”

Devonny was not thinking.

She was seeing.

There was a tower.

There were three towers.

There was a mansion.

Her long thick hair lay heavily on her shoulders. Her eyes burned with staring. She was afraid to point it out to Tod. Perhaps he had not noticed.

Had they driven through Time this Time, instead of falling?

Was Time now a simple matter of taking a road?

She was trying to listen, trying to hear her own century.

From somewhere, for some reason, some Time was calling.

The tower was supported by two crossing beams above Aurelia's head. She dragged the cot to the middle of the room and stood on it, measuring the distance.

Then she sat back down on the cot and methodically ripped the sheets in strips, weaving them for strength.

She was afraid she did not have sufficient courage. But she knew she did not have enough courage to face this life of confinement.

"O my son!" she cried out loud. "O my daughter! What courage did each of you need? And I was not there when you needed me. I contributed to your sorrow."

She clung to the torn edge of the sheet and said to her Maker, "I have sinned. Please forgive me. Please let me come to You in spite of my sins and in spite of what I am about to do."

"Stop the car," whispered Devonny. "I have to get out."

Tod said, "Dev, it's freezing out. You didn't wear a coat."

She got out of the station wagon.

Tod leaned on the horn.

"Stop it!" she shouted at him. "Stop making any noise!"

He stared at her and got out of the car, too, closing his door carefully so there was no slam. She was looking everywhere. She was touching air, she was stepping around things that did not exist. "Dev?" he said nervously.

"Let go of me," she said to him.

"I'm not holding you." She's there, he thought. In her Time. She can see what I can't, touch what I can't, hear what I can't.

He was deeply afraid, and he hated his own fear. "Dev," he said, wanting to hold her safe from pain and fear, wanting her to stay, and be his.

She was strangely blurry.

"No," he said, "you've come such a long way, Dev, and you came for a reason, and we haven't found it yet! Dev, don't go."

"Let go, Tod," she pleaded, although they were yards apart. "I need to go home. I was wrong and you were right. A lady cannot wait for a man to rescue her. A lady cannot be weak-minded. She cannot demand that somebody else do something! A lady must rescue herself."

Tod's lips were numb and his hands stiff. "Devonny," he said, and he thought, I wanted to rescue her.

Devonny turned to him and she was clear again; she was herself and beautiful and gold and—he was surprised by this—strong.

"Whatever is wrong when I get there, Tod, whatever I suffer, whoever hurts me, whatever my father does—none of that matters."

He was the one who hurt. He hurt all over, as if she were beating him up.

"You told me I must stand alone," she said.

I didn't mean it, thought Tod, trying to approach her again, trying to take her hand. He thought of his mother, when divorce seemed imminent, shrieking at Dad that she was just fine alone! fine! go! see if I care!

But she cared. And she had not been fine alone.

Alone was hard.

He did not want Devonny to go alone into whatever Time was, and he did not want to be alone here.

He wondered where Strat was. Alone? And where would Devonny be? Alone?

And where am I?

"Let go of me, Tod," she whispered. "You are keeping me prisoner."

"No," he said, shocked, "I never did that, I never meant that. I was only trying to help."

So he let go. He had touched her only once, and yet he had to unwrap his daydreams and release his half hopes, and let go.

There was a gust of wind, as fierce as a hurricane, and he closed his eyes against it, and hunched his shoulders, hearing screams that were not his,

pressed against shudders which were the suffering of others, and when it ended and he could open his eyes, he was alone with the grass and the wind and the seagulls.

There was no Devonny.

For a long time Tod clung to the edge of the car, waiting. It grew dark. There was nothing left to wait for.

He drove home.

NINE



*L*ord Winden had meant this to be clandestine. He had intended to hire a carriage, travel at dusk, browbeat the few remaining servants, and then, soft and strong in the dark, carry the first Mrs. Stratton to safety.

He had most certainly not intended that his mother would notify Hiram Stratton, and Mr. Stratton would come with his fourth wife, Florinda, a silly little creature whose assets were unknown, and that Mr. Stratton would bring not one but two attorneys, and his own mother, the Duchess, would come along with her maidservant and with Gordon and Miles, whom she had adopted as her escorts in New York.

“I forbid you to do this!” shouted Mr. Stratton. “You may not enter my home!”

Hugh-David entered. The police had been so breathtakingly courteous during the church episode that he was confident they would not dream of arresting a man with a title. His title was minor, almost meaningless, and nobody in England cared, since everybody (especially his own brothers) came ahead of him, but here they did not know that.

He had always wanted some great expedition, some new world to conquer. He had thought possibly of exploring the Amazon or reaching the South Pole. Possibly joining one of the splashier commands in order to defeat mountain tribes who did not want to become Queen Victoria’s subjects.

Breaking down an attic door was not world-shaking. Gordon and Miles were smirking, preparing yet another story to tell London about pathetic old Hugh-David. Perhaps Devonny was correct and he was horse manure.

There was an incredible amount of commotion. Mr. Stratton was yelling. The attorneys were yelling. The Duchess was yelling. Servants

were yelling. The fourth wife was yelling.

“I do not know why you are making all this racket,” said Hugh-David with as much dignity as he could muster. “I am simply going to see that my fiancée’s mother has proper housing. Please lower your voices and behave in a reasonable manner.”

Nobody took this suggestion.

They entered the huge Mansion. What had been beautiful and romantic by summer was grim and haunted by winter. The floors creaked and groaned. The servants carried lanterns, which cast shadows, creating hollows and pits where none existed. The flat floor felt treacherous, as if it might tilt beneath his feet like the deck of the ship where Gianni Anello had been imprisoned.

“If you think I am going to take on the burden of some divorced creature, you may think again!” shrieked his mother.

His manservant had armed him with a hammer but Hugh-David had no idea how to use the weapon. Luckily, the same servant had whispered in his ear that all he really needed to do was slide the bolt on the attic door. Hugh-David reminded himself that it was not his mother on whom he would use the hammer.

“Stop this!” demanded his mother, planting her ample body in front of him. “We are returning to England before you make an even greater fool of yourself.”

“I will return to England when Devonny is found.”

“Why are you doing this when I have expressly forbidden it?” demanded his mother.

He found the great stair. He could see none of its colors in this dark, none of its riches and splendors. It was colder indoors than out. How could that be? Hiram Stratton’s cruelty to his ex-wife seemed especially horrible because it was so cold.

“I’m doing this,” said Lord Winden, “because it is right.”

Gordon burst out laughing. “If you could see yourself, Hugh,” he said. “You look utterly ridiculous, storming across America to rescue some shriveled-up old prune as if she were a beautiful golden-haired princess.”

They were at the bottom of the great stair. The cold swirled down from the height of the open shaft, so fierce and dreadful they looked up, half expecting icicles on the chandeliers.

There stood the princess.

Screams rose in their throats, choked back from fear of what they were screaming at.

It was a specter. A dark ghost. A thing of medieval horror and power.

It was Devonny.

Hugh only half recognized her, for she was garbed in some sort of trouser, like a barbarian in the hills. Her lovely hair was loose, and somehow dusty, and disarranged. She stood silently above them and he felt a tremor, as if they were her subjects, and had disobeyed.

“Where did you come from?” he whispered. “Are you all right? Have you been here all along? *Did your own father lock you in the tower with your mother?* What is going on, Devonny? Please forgive me! I did not think of looking in your own house.”

Behind Devonny stood her mother, a wraith more real.

Down they came. Step by step. Slow as a wedding march.

Hiram Stratton backed away. He mumbled, “No, that’s not true, I didn’t do that, it isn’t me, it didn’t happen.” He tripped and fell heavily.

Devonny asked Hugh-David, “You were on your way to save my mother?”

“Yes,” he said. He was numbed by her loveliness, shocked by the garb her father had forced her to wear. The audacity of the man! First imprisoning the son, then the former wife, finally the daughter! To what end? For what reason?

For a long while she did not speak. She paused three steps above him and examined the face of the man she had been destined to marry. He stared back. He was stronger than he had been. Standing up to his mother was an act he had never expected to achieve, and he had done it, and let Gordon and Miles laugh. He was stronger. Devonny, too, was stronger. Not weakened by her ordeal, she was calm and certain, standing in judgment of him.

“We have all suffered enough,” said Devonny. “Let us not accuse one another of crimes and cruelty.”

Hiram lurched to his feet. “But—”

“Let us forget the past.”

She is a great lady, thought Hugh-David. Her wedding destroyed, her place in Society battered, her reputation suffering, her father responsible for her terrible fate—and she wants us to forget this. “I am impressed, Devonny. I would be bringing charges against him. I would force him to suffer as he forced you. And you, after all you have suffered, you choose to forgive.”

She descended the final steps, and now, standing on the same level as the rest, she seemed almost ordinary. The ice goddess from the top of the stairs was just a thin girl trying hard not to weep.

He wanted desperately to protect her. Idiot, he thought. You have failed to protect her.

He held out his hand to his bride and she took it. Her skin was so cold. He gathered her in, pulling off his coat, wrapping her up. “Gordon,” he ordered, “put your coat around Mrs. Stratton. They are freezing.”

He could not know how relieved Devonny was when he jumped to the wrong conclusion and accidentally supplied an explanation for where she had been. They assumed Father was responsible. She would never correct them.

Armed with his hammer, standing in front of those who opposed him, Hugh-David did not look at all the way she remembered him. He looked handsome, and brave, and a little bit silly. She found herself smiling.

“How would you have cared for my mother?” she said.

“He didn’t know,” snapped a monstrously huge woman in a vast fur robe, who could only be Hugh-David’s mother. “He was just stumbling around hoping things would work out.”

How courageous of him to stand up to his bear of a mother. Devonny knew what it was like; she had a bear of a father. “I thank you, Winnie,” said Devonny, who also knew what it was to stumble around hoping things would work out. “I thank you for your faith in me. I thank you for coming against my father’s will, and against the law, to save my mother. I admit that I did not respect you, Winnie, but now I do. You have character, and strength of mind, and I will always think well of you.”

“I was hoping you would not call me Winnie,” he said.

“I think it fits quite well,” she said. “I absolve you from any pledge. You may return to your country with honor, for you have treated me honorably, even in my absence, and in the face of a laughing public.”

Instead of bowing gracefully and turning to leave, Hugh-David took both her hands. "Miss Stratton," he said humbly, "will you marry me after all?"

"What?" shrieked his mother. "You have narrowly escaped an alliance with these awful people! I forbid this!"

"What?" yelled Hiram Stratton. "You will get no dowry from me!"

"See?" shouted the Duchess. "There is no point to this without the settlement!"

Lord Winden knelt.

Devonny thought of loneliness and compromise and rescue. She thought of love and honor. She thought of the world she had nearly lost. She thought of the frail and desperate mother in the shadows, where already too much time had been spent.

Angry parents were shrieking. Winnie did not see or hear them, and neither did she.

"I have grown up a little," said Hugh-David. "I too would like to marry a person with character and strength, and that is you."

The yelling of parents receded into the distance. To be wanted for her strength was a beautiful thing. She would have liked to tell Tod. She felt a terrible pang. She would never be able to show anything off to Tod.

"There will be no mistresses," she told Hugh-David.

"No."

"There will be no gambling."

"No."

She thought of her travel through time; of her dear brother, whom she would never meet again, but whom Annie had lifted, somehow, into Egypt and archaeology. She said to Hugh-David, "When you travel to places like India, I will go along. You will never leave me behind."

"Yes."

She thought of Tod's designer water and his soccer team and his amazing mother and the great privilege it had been to share, so briefly, their world. "If I decide to start a business, you will not interfere."

"Start a business?" said Hugh-David, his jaw dropping.

"The children," said Devonny, "will have the names I choose." For the girls she would choose Annie and Harriett, and for the boys, Lockwood and Stratton.

“Wait,” said Hugh-David. “Wait just a minute. I did not agree to that.”

Devonny’s stepmother and Devonny’s mother exchanged happy smiles. “They sound married already, don’t they?” said Florinda.

“I think they will get along very well,” agreed Aurelia.

“Let’s plan the wedding,” said Florinda.

“No!” shouted Hugh-David’s mother. “Not without a contract.”

“Never!” shouted Hiram. “I have suffered enough! I am not paying for the privilege!”

“We have a contract,” said Devonny. “It is signed. It is legal. Father has no choice. There is a dowry, Winnie, and it is the same one you thought you were getting. Father had the best lawyers, the tightest arrangements, and the firmest phrasing.” She smiled, for she was truly happy. She had learned the most important thing, and it had nothing to do with one century or another. To help a stranger was what counted; to care for one another. And in both centuries, the people who mattered had done so. Including her husband-to-be.

“And this time,” said Devonny Aurelia Victoria Stratton to her future husband, “I insist upon a new wedding gown.”

For All Time

I



Time to Fight

ANNIE: 1999

When her parents finally got married again and left for their honeymoon, nobody was happier than Annie Lockwood.

She now had four days—precisely ninety-six hours—in which she would be unsupervised. Annie had convinced her parents that while they were gone, she would be responsible, trustworthy and dependable.

None of this was true. Every single promise to her mother and father she had no intention of keeping.

She was alone at last. The wedding guests were gone and her parents en route to Florida. Her brother was on a bus with his team, headed to basketball camp. The house was utterly quiet. Annie stood in the center of her bedroom, unaware of the clutter around her, and gathered her courage.

Opening her top desk drawer, Annie removed a small envelope and shook it until a scrap of newspaper fell out. It landed between a mug of pencils and a stack of CDs.

EGYPTIAN ART IN THE AGE OF THE PYRAMIDS

September 16, 1999—January 9, 2000

Metropolitan Museum of Art

New York, New York

Annie despised museums. Whenever there was a class trip to a museum, she tried to be sick and stay home for the day. If this failed, she slouched in the teacher's wake, wishing she could get pushed around in a wheelchair, because nothing was more tiring than standing in front of a painting.

But today was different. In a few hours, Annie would be standing in front of a photograph which had merited one brief mention in the newspaper article about the special exhibition. Taken one hundred years

ago, this portrait showed every member of the original archaeology expedition.

And would the person she cared about most, the person she had known one hundred years ago, be in that photograph? How vividly Annie remembered Strat's mopy hair and broad shoulders, his casual grin and easy slouch. Every time she touched the newsprint, she felt Strat through the ink.

Strat was in Egypt, waiting for her.

She could feel him. She would cross Time and be with him again.

Four days lay ahead of her. Surely Time understood the urgency and would bring her to Strat.

Annie unzipped her bridesmaid dress. It was a fashion disaster in emergency room green, which indeed made Annie look as if she needed to be hospitalized. Why had Mom's college roommate agreed to put this dress on her body twenty years ago, when she was maid of honor? Why had this roommate saved the dress, so that Annie would have to wear it in public?

But in the end, wearing such a dress was a small sacrifice to celebrate that her mother and father were not getting divorced after all.

Dad's hobby for the last few years had been another woman. Annie and her brother hadn't expected their parents to have another anniversary, let alone another wedding. But not only did Mom and Dad seem truly back together, Mom had talked Dad into getting married a second time for their twentieth anniversary.

When Mom came down the aisle, as lovely as ever in her original white satin wedding gown, even Annie's cynical brother, Tod, was dabbing at tears. Annie chose to believe that Dad repeated his vows—broken once—with every intention of keeping them this time around.

The word *time* had swirled throughout every conversation of the second wedding day.

My parents loved and lost, thought Annie. Today, they swore to love again. I loved and lost. Today, I, too, will have a second chance.

She let the ghastly dress fall onto the carpet and stepped out of it. Annie was fond of floors, which were the best storage space. She kicked off her dyed-to-match satin shoes, peeled away her stockings and stood barefoot

and happy in front of her closet. She had even bought clothing from an adventure catalog to wear for this museum trip.

She put on the long swirling skirt of khaki twill; the full-sleeved silky white blouse; the jacket with bright buttons and many pockets. She tied a scarlet scarf loosely at her throat and pulled on footgear that was half army boot, half sneaker, and fully cool.

In the full-length mirror, with her pale complexion and sleek dark hair falling to her waist, she had a dated look, like a young schoolmarm from another time.

She drew some deep breaths, preparing herself, trying to still her racing heart and hopes. She had never gone into New York City alone. The kick of the city was going with friends. But if Annie was right about this, she would meet the friend she cared about most in the museum. He would be in the photograph, waiting.

She would climb through.

STRAT: 1899

Strat was riding a camel.

He had expected a camel to be like a horse. He would become friends with his camel, which would trot to meet him in the morning and nuzzle him affectionately.

Camels, however, despised Strat. They spat and growled, they gave him dirty looks, they tried to bite and they never stopped making nasty noises.

Strat had had stepmothers like this camel.

His father had had two activities in life: money and marriage. Father had been extremely good at money, but not good at wives. But then, money was worth holding on to and wives were not. For this and other reasons, Strat hoped never to speak to, write to, or be in the same room with, his father again.

But once he mounted the camel (sitting on something more like a table than a saddle, with pillows and backrest, a carpet and a sunshade), the camel forgot Strat was there, as indeed Strat hoped Father had forgotten about him. Riding a camel was like sitting in a rocking chair that happened to progress toward the horizon. Strat could bring a picnic or a book, write a letter or take a nap.

Today, however, he was bringing two dead bodies into Cairo.

The bodies were wrapped in a canvas tent flap. The Egyptian servants had first draped the bodies over a donkey's back, but Egyptian donkeys were very small, so the bodies hung with their heads dangling in the dust on one side and their feet on the other. The loss of dignity was great. Strat had to bring them up onto the camel with him.

It was not as awful as he would have expected to have two dead bodies in his lap. In Egypt, who could fail to think of death? The land itself was death, blazing murderous desert encircling stone cities of the dead, occupied now by whole cities of archaeologists. Strat's archaeologist, Dr.

Lightner, searched for death. It was Dr. Lightner's great hope to find a mummy in a royal tomb, untouched by Time or robbers.

Even Strat's camera was death. It recorded on paper what had existed a moment ago but would never exist in the same way again.

Strat had been dreaming of death. In the dream, he was buried alive. When a shaft leading to a long-lost tomb was opened, he, Strat, tumbled in and was forgotten, to be smothered by shovelful of sand and bucketsful of stone as the shaft was filled in. The dream was so vivid that Strat would wake up with his fingers scrabbling at the low tent ceiling, trying to claw through canvas to get air.

He wondered what the two French campers had been dreaming of when they rolled over in their sleep.

The Egyptians had refused to deal with the bodies. The Pyramid, they said, was fine to climb by day, but by night, it belonged to the ghosts of the past. Persons on the Pyramid at night should expect to be accosted by the spirits of those who had gone before.

How Dr. Lightner scoffed. "You and I, of course," he said to Strat, as they packed the bodies, "have no such superstitious beliefs."

Dr. Lightner was incorrect. *Superstitious* meant believing in things inconsistent with the known laws of science. Strat had witnessed something inconsistent with the known laws of science. Father had imprisoned Strat in a lunatic asylum because of what Strat claimed. So Strat could not quite so easily dismiss the idea of ghosts from the past.

He had volunteered to go to the French embassy in Cairo because he could not bear to think of the families who would not know what had happened to their boys. Strat knew what it was like never to have answers about the fate of somebody you loved.

Everybody was delighted not to have to think of the dead tourists again and they were quite cheery as they waved good-bye to Strat.

Egypt was crammed with tourists. Boats overflowed with archaeologists; camels were top-heavy with dreamers; donkeys were laden with watercolor artists. Strat made all his spending money by taking photographs of elderly British maiden ladies and spry old Italian men, of sparkly uniformed British soldiers en route to conquer the Sudan and pipe-smoking German scholars who argued with Dr. Lightner's conclusions.

Tourists paid well, and the more money he made, the more he could send to Katie. Not that it was money Katie needed. In her letters, she assured Strat that she was proud of him and that was enough, he need send no dollars.

It was not enough, and Strat knew this utterly.

Katie wanted love, but Strat had given away the love he possessed. He had given love to his family, and in return, had been destroyed by his own father. He had given love to Harriett, and she had died. He had given love to Annie, and she was lost to another world.

Strat was still a nice person who knew his duty. But his heart was desiccated, like the hearts of mummies in tombs: a hard dry thing, without hope. And now he lurched on a camel with dead men whose hopes had ended.

Oh, Annie! he thought, staring at the burned gold of desert sand. Will I ever see you again?

Time was flying by. It was November of 1899. In six short weeks, Time would hurtle around a huge and magnificent corner, becoming another century.

Nineteen hundred.

If Strat did not cross Time now, he never would.

And so Strat decided that he, too, would spend the night on top of the Pyramid, in the hope that the Egyptians were correct and he would meet the spirits of those who had gone before.

He approached the French embassy in the belief that he had everything under control. He even spoke a little French, which was good, because Frenchmen felt that the English language—especially spoken with an American accent—was a poor way to communicate.

But after the spoken formalities were over, there were paper formalities. Forms to be filled out. Signatures.

Strat had not expected to need his name.

Everybody at the dig called him Strat and never asked for more. He was not one of the impressive young men, college boys from Yale or Princeton who were playing at archaeology for a few months before joining their fathers' law firms in Boston. He was merely the camera boy, practically a servant.

He should have come up with a false name long before, but he had been too dumb. He had thought thousands of miles would protect him from the name Hiram Stratton. Strat pasted a fake smile on his face and scribbled. "Archibald Lightner."

The French turned cold. He was no longer forgiven for being American. "You will sign your own name," they said sharply, "not your employer's."

"I'm not in charge," he protested.

They whipped out a fresh form. "You brought the bodies. You sign."

He could have chosen any name. John Strat. Strat Johnson. But he panicked and scribbled a meaningless squash of letters. He found himself with a cold and severe Frenchman.

Why was he reluctant to state his real name? the attaché demanded. What made him volunteer to dispose of the bodies? Where had Strat been, at midnight, when the two boys supposedly rolled over and fell to their deaths?

The attaché pulled the ends of his mustache into thin cords, revealing thin lips tightened in suspicion. "How did these boys die?" asked the officer. "Did you push them?"

ANNIE: 1999

Annie climbed the Grand Staircase of the Metropolitan Museum, silently thanking every benefactor whose name was recorded on the marble panels on either side of her. New York would be less grand without this museum, and these were the men and women who had provided it.

Then she forgot everything except the special exhibition.

It was divided among rooms whose gray carpet went right up the walls, giving both exhibition and visitors a padded permanent look, as though they would be here forever, enclosed in cloudy gray. She was bumped by two very old ladies with museum headsets perched in their white curls. A girl in frayed black sweats sat cross-legged on the floor, sketching a statue whose eyes had been ripped out in antiquity. A middle-aged man read the translation of an ancient papyrus, while a tiny delicate woman studied a trinket box carved from hippopotamus ivory.

There were a number of photographs. Each one had a caption. LIGHTNER EXPEDITION. 1899.

The first one Annie studied was not framed, just tacked to splintered wood. It was black and white, yet full of glare and heat. It showed a woman caught in a whip of sand and dust, arm raised against her face so she could breathe, her long skirt billowing, and beyond her, the rising side of a vast pyramid.

Who was the woman? The placard did not say.

Maybe it's me, thought Annie Lockwood.

The contents of the next room had come from the tomb of a queen named Hetepheres, mother of King Khufu, who built the Great Pyramid.

The tomb of Hetepheres had been found entirely by accident when a cameraman employed by the archaeologists got clumsy. His heavy wooden tripod fell over, striking a patch of plaster that had hitherto concealed the entrance to the shaft.

The placard did not give the name of the cameraman.

Was it Strat?

If she could touch the photo, she'd know. She'd feel Strat through that paper. Or she wouldn't.

A museum guard, finely tuned to be aware of all ready-to-touch visitors, gave Annie the heavy-lidded look of authority.

She stumbled on.

In the third room was a small gold statue of Sekhmet, goddess of revenge, on a pedestal behind glass. And there, at eye level on the carpeted wall, was the photograph described in the newspaper article: every member of the dig that had uncovered the tomb of Hetepheres.

Museum visitors were standing in front of it and blocking Annie's view. She peered around shoulders and between the straps of handbags.

The picture was large, with the quiet hazy look of early photographs. A dozen people had posed in two rows, shadowed by the brims of hats they had worn a hundred years ago to protect themselves from the Egyptian sun. They seemed to have been mummified as they waited for the picture to be taken.

Slowly the exhibition visitors rotated on. One boy was still half in Annie's way, but she couldn't wait any longer, even though she wanted to be alone with her photograph. She shouldered the boy away and carefully examined each tiny black-and-white face. This had to be her shaft through Time.

But Strat was not in the photograph.

Annie was just a silly girl in silly clothing, wearing her silly hopes. "Oh, Strat!" she said, heart bursting with grief.

The boy who was also still looking at the photograph said, "Yes?"

CAMILLA: 1899

Six months after the murder of her father, Camilla Mateusz decided to become a man, because men were paid more. She had read once that a Confederate girl pretended to be a soldier throughout the entire War Between the States and never got caught. So why couldn't Camilla be a man during the twelve working hours of the day—and never get caught?

Camilla possessed an advantage in such a masquerade. She towered over all ladies and most men.

A lady must be delicate, with white throat and narrow ankles. Not that anybody believed a Polish girl was within reach of being a lady, but Camilla Mateusz had an additional affliction. She was six feet tall in a generation where most girls were hardly more than five. When she was sitting, people thought her attractive, and praised the thick blond braids, rosy cheeks and blue eyes.

Eventually, however, Camilla had to stand up. Mill hand or shopkeeper, priest or policeman—everybody who saw Camilla unfold burst out laughing. Who would ever marry her?

Only once had her height been useful, in the wonderful new game called basketball. How grand to feel the joy men had always felt: throwing a ball.

Of course, girls did not play the same game as boys. Girls, for example, could not dribble, which was a skill far beyond their capacities. The court was only half as large, and in long skirts, girls did not move quickly. Last season, however, the girls had actually been permitted to play against another school's team. Oh, not without arguments. The community was outraged by this attack against feminine behavior. It was clear where this kind of thing would lead. Lovely sweet girls would be ruined.

They pointed to Camilla as proof, how unwomanly she was, with her attention to the ball and her desire to win.

Well, Camilla had lost the joy of basketball. She had lost her chance to win a high school diploma as well. But she had not lost her father's courage. He had crossed a terrible ocean, worked hard at a terrible job and died a terrible death. He had done this for his family and she could not do less.

What to do about the waist-length yellow hair of which she was so proud?

Since men wore caps or hats in the street, as a man, she could cover her hair to an extent, but caps were removed indoors. Camilla would have to have short hair. And so she gave herself a ragged haircut, put on Papa's clothing and Papa's cap. Low on her cheeks she rubbed a little soot from the kerosene lamp. Then she put on Papa's old reading glasses, smudging them a bit in hope of lessening the blue of her eyes.

Oh, Papa! He had had his heart set on seeing his children finish school. *They* would not spend their lives in a mine or mill. *They* would go to an office, have clean jobs and wear white shirts with white collars.

The Mateusz family had but one photograph on their walls. It was large and quiet in its heavy brown frame. Mama was seated, Papa standing behind her, his hand resting on her shoulder. Mama wore the dress she had been married in and Papa his only suit—the one in which he had lately been buried. Seven children stood around them, solemn and proud to be in a portrait. Since then, the three oldest had had to drop out of school to work in the mills—or rather, the remaining mill; the one Mr. Hiram Stratton had *not* burned down; the one in which her father had *not* died.

This morning Mama had had no food to put in the lunch pails. Irena and Magdalena, Antony and Marya did not cry. They just looked a little more pinched as they set out for school. Stefan, age thirteen, shrugged and walked out to endure his twelve-hour day. But Jerzy paused for a moment, running his fingers over the pile of his abandoned schoolbooks, still stacked on the shelf by the door. He made a fist, hit the wall, apologized to his mother and went to the factory. Jerzy was fourteen.

Mr. Hiram Stratton, Sr., the man whose wealth and needs dictated all that happened in this city, had broken a strike by the simple expedient of burning down the factory. He had not checked to see if the factory was empty. He ordered his thugs to torch it, and they did. Michael Mateusz had been there. He had not gotten out.

Hiram Stratton was not accused of arson. He was not accused of murder. In fact, he was named the next police commissioner.

So Camilla left a note for her mother. "I've gone to get a good job. I will send money so the boys can return to school. Do not worry about me. I am strong."

Newspaper advertisements contained four possible jobs. The first three interviews went badly. She blushed when she pretended to be Cameron Matthews instead of Camilla Mateusz. She lowered her eyes demurely, forgetting to stare man to man. She did not remember to stride or swing her arms. Furthermore, she went in the morning, while sunlight streamed into each office. Nobody guessed that this very tall person could be a girl, but they were puzzled and uncertain and did not want to hire her.

The fourth interview was late in the afternoon. Camilla found herself at an office that did not yet have electric lights, and the single lamp in the little room scarcely illuminated the papers on the desk, never mind the stranger in the door. She paused for courage, reading the sign.

DUFFIE DETECTIVE AGENCY.

WE FOLLOW YOUR SPOUSE.

WE FIND YOUR MONEY.

Camilla's heart sank.

She could not be party to the sort of things that led to divorce! Aside from the fact that the Church would disapprove, she might lose faith in the human race.

Although, given what Hiram Stratton had done, what faith had she in the human race anyway?

She raised her hand to cross herself, and keep away the evil of such practices as arson and divorce, when she was greeted by the man who must be Mr. Duffie. Just in time, Camilla remembered that her pretend self, Cameron Matthews, was probably not a good Catholic.

But Mr. Duffie thought she meant to shake hands, so he got halfway up from his desk, extending his hand over the wide wooden top. Luckily she had been doing this all day and knew to grip hard.

His black pomaded hair glistened on his head. He might, or might not, have brushed his teeth the week before. He handed her a form to fill out.

Cameron Matthews, she wrote, in big strong script.

High school diploma, she added, instead of *Eighth-grade graduate*.

Mr. Duffie held her paperwork close to the lamp and scanned the page quickly. "Matthews," he said approvingly. "A good English name. You don't know how many Poles and Czechs come in here, expecting to be hired, as if they were regular people."

Camilla spat into the tobacco stand to demonstrate her disgust at the current situation in America. This was a hard part of being a man. Why did men always have spit in their mouths? She certainly never had any spare spit in her mouth.

Mr. Duffie leaned back in a wooden swivel chair and chewed the tip of a pipe. "What I need, Mr. Matthews," said Duffie, "is a man willing to masquerade as a woman. I know, I know. A shameful thing to ask. I have had men vomit at the suggestion of imitating a female. But in this line of work, there are situations into which a man cannot go. A female, however, could do so."

That would be interesting, thought Camilla. I'd be a woman pretending to be a man pretending to be a woman. "Why then," she asked, in her new deep voice, "do you not simply hire a female?"

Mr. Duffie laughed out loud. "Nobody would trust the evidence of a female. Who would hire my agency if it became known that I used female operatives? No, I need a man to disguise himself."

"You ask a great deal," said Camilla, accepting the offer of chewing tobacco.

"I pay a great deal, Mr. Matthews," said Mr. Duffie, writing the amount on a piece of paper and shoving it toward her.

Camilla nearly swallowed her tobacco. He told the truth. He paid a great deal. If she lived frugally, not only could Jerzy and Stefan return to school, lunch pails would be full! Mama could pay somebody else to do the laundry!

Camilla trembled with the desire to have all that money, but suppressed her shiver as unmanly.

"Well, Matthews?" demanded Duffie.

“I shall undertake the task, humiliating though it will be to act like a woman. You will call me Cameron as a man, and Camilla as a woman. You will give me an advance against my salary so that I may purchase female garments. Is this Camilla Matthews to be rich? Or some poor shopwoman? Is she to read and write? Should she talk with an accent? Describe her to me.”

The detective was impressed. “You are going to be excellent, Mr. Matthews,” he said. “Or should I say, Miss Matthews? You and I will make a great team.”

And so it began.

The loneliest, strangest life Camilla could imagine. There could be no friends or family. There could not even be the Church. Tell a priest the sins she was daily committing? The sinful people she followed and watched? The sinful people from whom she accepted pay?

She lived in a boardinghouse, never going home, lest her family grasp the shameful, scandalous decision she had made. Were Jerzy and Stefan ever to understand the life their sister was leading, they would refuse her money, quit school again and go back to the mills. So Camilla mailed the money to her mother.

The boardinghouse was for men only, of course. Boardinghouses did not mix the sexes. She shared a bathroom with the other five boarders. This was an extraordinary difficulty. But she managed in part because the other five cared nothing for cleanliness.

At night, safe under rough sheets, Cameron-Camilla Matthews could be Camilla Mateusz again. She would smother her pain against the pillow, yearning to be back in school, studying history, increasing her math skills and translating her Latin.

But she was the man of the family now. When a man had a family to support, he must forget himself and his plans.

And so the months dragged on. Once, dressed as Cameron Matthews, she strolled past the grammar school to feast her eyes on Irena and Magdalena, Antony and Marya. The girls wore new dresses! Their cheeks were pink with good health. Antony had his own baseball bat.

Sitting on the stoop of a tenement, pretending to fix her bootlaces, Camilla saw Jerzy dash out of the adjacent high school, joyfully taking the steps two at a time, running across the paved playground to greet the little ones. She heard him laugh.

And so she went on with her masquerade. But she did not laugh.

At least she could let her hair grow out. When she had to be Cameron Matthews, she wore a cap, pinning her hair safely beneath it. But when she was Camilla, she could brush her hair and admire how yellow it was, buy a ribbon and try on hats.

She visited Duffie only at dusk, when the man was exhausted, ready to go to his own boardinghouse for dinner, wishing to spend as little time with her as possible. She had already ascertained that his eyesight was poor and his spectacles unhelpful. He saw only the tall gawky frame of Cameron Matthews, and unless she made a large blunder, Duffie would never realize the secret of her gender.

"Today, Mr. Matthews," said Duffie, "I have for you an extraordinary assignment. You will have heard of the great gentleman, Hiram Stratton, Sr.—the railroad millionaire."

Camilla was almost sick with an evil hope. Perhaps Stratton's current wife was trying to divorce him. Perhaps Camilla was to have a chance to ruin the man. "I believe Hiram Stratton also owned a factory in the city at one time," said Camilla.

"Yes, it burned down. We're not involved with that. We're after the son. Hiram Stratton, Jr."

Camilla had not known there was a son. How dare Hiram Stratton, Sr., enjoy a son, while Michael Mateusz would never see his sons grow up?

"The son ran away," said Mr. Duffie. "It's a very sad story. He had to be punished for a serious dereliction of duty to his father. He was kept in a private asylum so that he might come to his senses. However, the boy fled from his captivity. Not only did he attack a doctor, but he kidnapped two fellow patients! He did it not for ransom, but for disguise, so that he might look like a family man. I cannot imagine how he pulled it off."

Disguise was overrated. If Camilla could trick the world, so could a sneaky sly son of a Stratton.

"How the great man dreams of a joyful reunion with his long-lost son," said Duffie.

Great man, indeed. Why was it that any man of wealth was great, no matter how he acquired his money or what he did with it? Camilla wanted to know.

“I was honored when the great man chose me to find the boy. I have been working on this, Mr. Matthews, and at last, have an avenue to follow. Stratton junior took his two victims to Spain, where he abandoned them. I am sending you to Spain to interview the female and obtain Junior’s current address.”

Spain! thought Camilla. Spain of bullfighters and flamenco dancers? Spain of a thousand castles? “Tell me about the kidnap victims,” she said.

“Shocking,” replied Duffie. “One was a young man with so small a brain he never learned how to talk; the other, a woman with a hideously deformed body. Naturally their parents put them away. We do not have the female’s full name, since her family, of course, did not want the shame of admitting her existence. She wasn’t identified by a last name even in the asylum records. But her first name is Katie. You will find her involved with some sort of hospital. St. Rafael. She seems to be a nurse now, rather than a patient.”

Insane asylums were often kind enough to take in defectives, and perhaps the creature really had learned nursing skills. Camilla’s heart broke for such a girl. What pain must she have met at the hands of Hiram Stratton, Jr.?

“But how will Mr. Stratton prevent a trial of young Stratton for the kidnappings?” asked Camilla. “Surely the parents of the two innocent victims will require justice.”

“It is my understanding,” said Duffie, “that the parents find it amusing. After all, they need no longer pay for care. No, do not concern yourself with them. As for a trial, naturally Mr. Stratton has paid everybody off. Such a low-class scandal must not be made public. No, we wish to accomplish the joyful reunion of father and son.”

I cannot bring joy to a Stratton! thought Camilla.

Mr. Duffie pared his nails. He did this when he was lying. “For this task,” he said casually, “you will be Camilla Matthews. You will offer comfort, real or false, whatever works. Promise the girl anything in order to get young Stratton’s location. Mr. Stratton is providing a large expense

account and you will spend whatever is necessary. You will cable me, of course, with every development.”

Camilla was no saint, to walk away from assignments that paid well. And it might be that in Spain, she could arrange things to her own satisfaction: Destroy the father and ruin the son.

Camilla’s heart raced in the ugly hot emotion of revenge. Oh, to have more power than Hiram Stratton! To shove in his face what he had shoved in hers! “I will go to Spain. I will need a large advance.” She named an outrageous figure.

Duffie sputtered and refused.

She unfolded, her six feet casting a threatening shadow over his desk. “I could inform Mr. Stratton that you are already cutting corners.”

They glared at each other and Duffie broke first. “Matthews, you are exactly right for this job. You shall have what you ask.”

How wonderful were the long voyage and the days of female company. How she cherished being once more part of the conversations and laughter and kindness of women. What a delight to discuss hair and fashion, children and church.

And yet ... being a woman again was not altogether satisfactory.

Camilla could no longer read a newspaper. She could no longer hold an opinion, nor be interested in sports and politics. As a man, she had commanded respect. As a woman, she was simply a creature too tall to be a dance partner.

Throughout the voyage, she studied Spanish, memorizing useful sentences, but once she arrived, as soon as she mentioned the name of the hospital—St. Rafael—every Spaniard melted away, saying nothing.

When, after several days, Camilla stumbled on St. Rafael, she knew why Mr. Stratton could get nobody else to interview Katie and why he did not go himself. She knew why Duffie had lied, pretending he was not aware of Katie’s situation.

It was a leper hospital.

Dreaded since the beginning of time, lepers were shunned for good reason. Before leprosy killed the patient, it first killed the nose and lips and fingers and feet, which rotted and fell off. The image of Katie

nauseated Camilla: deformed to start with—now a leper. She could not help imagining herself a leper. To interview Katie, not only must Camilla expose herself to this evil disease, she must lie to the nuns who ran St. Rafael.

For many hours, the twin desires for money and revenge were not enough to make her approach the lepers. At last, however, Camilla summoned her courage. “I am here,” she said to the nun who kept the gate, “in hope of visiting your nurse Katie. I have been sent by Devonny Stratton, who seeks news of her dear brother, Strat.” Camilla knew nothing of Devonny Stratton, except that the debutante had recently married a titled Englishman and was therefore also out of the country and her father’s clutches. “Devonny prays that in spite of the suffering inflicted upon her, Katie will assist in this endeavor.”

The nun said nothing.

Camilla remembered her instructions. Promise anything, whether you plan to do it or not. “Miss Stratton wishes to bring Katie home to America, and provide her with the means to live comfortably. Or should she prefer to stay here, to make a major donation to this very hospital.”

Nobody was going to give Katie a penny and as for taking her out of the leper hospital, allowing the dreaded infection into society—absurd. Not for any number of dollars.

The nun inclined her head, and rustled away to deliver the message. There was a long wait, during which Camilla’s courage dwindled. She fiddled with the lacy white cotton gloves that were part of her everyday clothing. Could mere gloves protect her from leprosy?

The nun returned. Katie would welcome Miss Matthews in her room.

Camilla was aghast. Go *inside*?

“Be not afraid,” said the nun gently, in English, as if accustomed to fearful American girls. “It takes years of exposure to acquire leprosy. An hour will not put you at risk. You will find Katie a delight, and glad to speak with a friend of Devonny Stratton. Follow me.”

Not at risk? Camilla thought. Of course I’m at risk! From time immemorial, people have known better than to get within rock-throwing distance of a leper.

She reminded herself of the money she would be paid. I’ll stay only a minute, she promised herself. When I leave, I’ll buy borax and scrub

myself for hours.

Katie was heavily garbed in white, even more veiled than the nun. Only her eyes and hands were exposed. Katie offered a hand to be shaken. Camilla had no choice, but she would burn the glove later.

"I am not diseased, Miss Matthews," said Katie gently. "I wear this veil so you will not see my deformities. My mother and father gave me to an asylum for storage, just as lepers are stored here. A decent and good person saved me from that asylum. Here indeed I try to be an equally good and decent person to others."

"That's why I've come," said Camilla. "Devonny is so very very worried about her beloved brother. She has had no news. She fears for his fate, now that he has become a kidnapper."

Katie laughed behind the veil. "I was not kidnapped. I was saved from a life of torment in a house of cruelty. In decency and in honor Strat left behind that which he loved and brought me here."

Women! thought Camilla. How we fall for anything a man says. "Would you tell me what young Mr. Stratton did that could be called honorable? Because I must admit to you that others disagree."

When Katie turned and went to sit on a small stool, a table set for tea was revealed: two cups, sugar and lemons. Drink tea poured by the hand of a leper? Camilla gagged.

"Strat and I crossed the ocean together, pretending to be brother and sister," explained Katie. "When we arrived penniless in Spain, we stayed at a convent and pretended to be on a pilgrimage. I was awestruck by the work of the nuns and I embraced their holy lives. Strat chose adventure and sailed on."

That was one way to look at it. Another was that Junior, having dragged her across the ocean, now dropped her off to die among the lepers.

"And the second person young Mr. Stratton so generously brought along?" said Camilla.

"Poor Douglass was born with very little brain," said Katie. "His parents, like mine, stored him in the asylum. Strat brought both of us to safety. I have Douglass with me here. He is happy. All is well, Miss Matthews."

All is well? Such sainthood made Camilla want to race out into the streets and do something wicked.

“And young Mr. Stratton?” she said carefully. “Is *he* safe? Is *he* happy? His dear sister misses him painfully and hopes for communication.”

From a tin box on a rickety wooden table by her narrow bed, Katie removed a packet of letters. She cradled them in her two hands like a bouquet, drinking in their scent.

Camilla tried to see the return address on the envelopes.

“Strat is a true gentleman,” said Katie softly. “A fine athlete and a splendid conversationalist. Generous of heart.”

Claptrap. The Stratton fellow would be his father’s son, gross and sweating. Wax on his mustache and gaudy rings denting his thick fingers. But then, how could poor Katie judge a man? All the men of her acquaintance had been born deformed, become criminal or decayed from disease.

Camilla made a decision. She drank her tea. “How refreshing,” she lied. “Is young Mr. Stratton yet in Spain? Does he visit you?”

Katie shook her head. “I had fine jewels, which a friend of Strat’s gave me when we were fleeing. We sold them, and with the proceeds, Strat was able to buy passage to Egypt.”

But not *your* passage, thought Camilla. “Egypt!” she cried, as if it were wonderful, and not the end of the earth. When young Stratton abandoned somebody, he really completed the job.

Accepting tea had been ever so wise. For now Katie was bursting with truth. “The coming war attracted Strat,” she said, leaning forward in excitement. “British troops are even now sailing up the Nile to attack rebels in Khartoum. Lord Kitchener asked for volunteers. Strat hoped to join a camel corps or help build the first desert railway on earth. But! Passing through Spain was the very famous Dr. Archibald Lightner. Of course you have heard of Dr. Lightner’s archaeological research.”

Camilla had hardly even heard of archaeology.

“Strat managed to make the great man’s acquaintance! Dr. Lightner had never had a staff photographer, as he was suspicious of the machinery, but had always used a watercolor artist. When Strat said he would become Dr. Lightner’s photographer for no pay, the great man accepted.”

Who would accept the gross and disgusting son of Hiram Stratton? Dr. Lightner had probably found out the family connection and was hoping for

money. An expedition to chop open a sphinx or a blast into a pyramid must be costly.

Her heart broke watching Katie, who had only death and letters to live for.

“Strat writes often with the details of his adventures,” said Katie, fingering the letters as if they were treasure. “He sends me all he earns.”

Not likely, thought Camilla, reading the address upside down.

*H. Stratton
c/o Dr. Archibald Lightner
Road to the Pyramids
Giza*

Katie lifted the letters to her lips and kissed them through the veil. And Camilla knew then that Katie loved Strat the way any girl loves a boy. With all her heart.

RENIFER: IN THE TWENTIETH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF KHUFU, LORD OF THE TWO LANDS

Renifer paused to gaze at the row of bodies staked on poles along the edge of the desert.

The three tomb robbers caught last week had finally died. The priests liked to spear prisoners so the stake traveled all the way up the inside of the body, but did not instantly kill. In this case, the tomb robbers had lived many hours, and one for days. Jackals crept out from the desert by night to chew on the dead men and had not minded eating the feet and thighs of one still alive.

Renifer gave a prayer of thanks that the tomb robbers had been so thoroughly punished.

Then she looked reverently at the just-completed Great Pyramid. How splendid it was, a mountain of shining limestone.

Everybody who lived on the Nile had been part of the Pyramid's creation.

Farmers and potters, fishermen and papyrus makers had the privilege of working on it. They cut and loaded stone, poled barges, dug out the sacred lake, paved the causeway. They baked bread to feed ten thousand workers and sun-dried a million bricks for their houses. They constructed a slideway and ramps to move the massive rocks. They polished the limestone casing, brought flowers for offerings and carried away the sand, one basket at a time. They painted the walls of chapels and the columns of courtyards with a hundred times a hundred portraits of gods, especially their own God. Pharaoh Himself.

The celebrations for the finished Pyramid had lasted for months.

Every man and woman with the strength to greet the morning sun came. They came from Upper Egypt and Lower Egypt, from Lebanon and Punt. They came if they were rich and they came if they were poor. They brought their children and their offerings and their prayers.

They rejoiced at the glory that was Pharaoh, and knelt at His passage when He was borne on His sedan chair, wearing His two crowns.

Twice, Renifer herself had attended Princess Meresankh, Pharaoh's daughter, when the princess brought food to her dead grandmother the queen. Together, royal princess and handmaiden prostrated themselves on the blistering hot silver-faced pavement in front of the queen's chapel.

"Mother of the King," Renifer sang, "follower of Horus, O gracious one, whose every utterance is done for her, daughter of the God's body, Hetepheres, we honor thee."

Afterward, Princess Meresankh actually *spoke* to Renifer, saying how well she sang the chants.

And then the festivities ended, and all Egypt went home.

Pharaoh's barge went back to His palace in Memphis. Shopkeepers sold linen; bakers sold bread. Boys learned to read; girls tended geese. Mothers nursed babies; farmers dug fields.

And tomb robbers, she thought, robbed tombs.

Renifer walked slowly, because it was very hot, one servant girl carrying the fruit they had bought at the market and the other fanning Renifer. Renifer was soon to have her own household and must become experienced in shopping.

Renifer was the envy of every girl she knew. Pankh was strong shouldered and brave. His skin, burnt so dark by the remorseless sun, was like black gold. He was the most handsome and the youngest supervisor of a royal wharf.

Eternal life was fine, and waiting on the princess was fine, but what Renifer cared about was having her own husband, her own house, and as soon as possible, her own children. She was fourteen and it was time.

The doorkeeper opened the big wooden entry set deep in the mud-brick wall. Inside, date palms kept the courtyard cool and shady. Father was reclining under the yellow-and-white-striped awning on the rooftop and Renifer went up the steep ladder to join him. Servants brought bread fresh from the oven and dates still hot from the lowering sun.

Soon the distant sand would turn red and purple with shadow and Pharaoh Himself would be praying for the sun's return in the morning. She would not repeat her own prayers in front of Father, who found religion amusing. Even the Pyramid meant little to Father, who just shook his head when he happened to notice it.

"You look especially lovely today," said her father, "and I think it time to discuss your marriage."

"Oh, yes, Father!" cried Renifer. "Pankh will be here soon. He's taking me to a concert on the wharf."

The days were so hot and glaring that the best entertainments occurred after dark. She helped herself to olives, planning what to wear. She owned much gold jewelry, but neither Father nor Pankh liked her to wear it in public. Sometimes Renifer pouted over that rule.

"Perhaps," said Father, "you should not marry Pankh after all. I can find a more prestigious match, now that you are in Princess Meresankh's favor."

She said dizzily, "But Father! Pankh is ready to bring me home."

Father shrugged. "Why settle for Pankh when you could do better? My grandsons could have noble blood."

Renifer cared more about hot blood, and from what Pankh said and did when they were alone, he could give her all the sons she might want. She tried to dispel her father's hopes. "The princess barely noticed me. She picked me out of a row of girls. Any soprano would do."

"No. The princess has requested you to attend her again next week. Furthermore, Daughter, the princess ordered you to meet her *within the palace walls*, not on the plaza where the musicians gather. You, my daughter, will be in the presence of Khufu, Lord of the Two Lands. The princess wishes you to sing for Him."

Pharaoh Himself would hear her sing?

It was too great an honor. She was not good enough.

And she was not sure she wanted the honor. She wanted to think about having a household, and folding bed linens freshly pressed, and of course making babies. If she had to sing for Pharaoh, she might get scared, and sing badly, and receive punishment, for the Living God must have the best and the first in all things.

She wanted to put Pankh first in all things. That was part of the wedding vow, and she could hardly wait to tell him yet again that he was first in all things.

“Tonight you will stay home with your mother,” said her father in the voice that brooked no discussion. “Nor will you be in the presence of Pankh. Tonight or any other night. You can do better. I shall end the engagement.”

“I must have misunderstood that statement,” said Pankh in a slow deep voice, startling them badly. He was standing on the rim of the roof, hands on hips, feet apart, looming in the dusk like a temple god. His white kilt was bright as moonlight and the gold bands on his arms as thick as jawbones. “Surely, Pen-Meru, you are not thinking of taking your daughter away from me.”

“It is not an official agreement, as you recall,” said Father dismissively. “Merely a discussion we had. A discussion I will now have with others as well.”

Pankh lifted from its pedestal the beautiful small statue Father had recently acquired of the goddess Sekhmet.

Sekhmet was portrayed as a seated lion goddess; her powers were many and terrifying. She could escort Pharaoh in war, but also sweep the country with disease. She was both love and hatred; both revenge and protection.

This Sekhmet was pure gold and fit for a Pharaoh.

Now Pankh lifted the goddess by her back, as a cat lifts her kittens. He tapped an insolent rhythm on her lion mane.

Father sat very still.

“Renifer is mine,” said Pankh softly, “and you, too, Pen-Meru, are mine.” He tightened his grip on Sekhmet, as a killer holds the rock with which he will break the skull.

Renifer felt Sekhmet’s anger like a spider’s web. The goddess’s fury was enveloping them all, as when irrigation canals open, and water turns the world into a web of water, and none can pass.

Her father caught his breath. “I was mistaken, Pankh,” he said hoarsely. “Of course Renifer is yours. Whenever you wish her.”

Renifer could hear the slap of oars on the water of the Nile, the laughter of children playing in the neighbors’ courtyards, the rustle of palm leaves in the wind. Her father—Pen-Meru—afraid?

Servants bustled up with torches to be set in their niches, plates of meat and bread and cheese, bowls of stew with barley and chickpeas. Renifer's little sister and brothers, having spent the day playing naked in the sun, came shrieking and giggling for dinner, their nurses running alongside to put robes on them as the air grew chilly.

"Come, Renifer," said Pankh. "The night is beautiful. We will return when it pleases me. Your father will not be talking to other suitors."

Her father was no longer in charge. She might have said her marriage vows already, because Pankh was the one whose permission she needed.

In the streets of Memphis they walked. They said good evening to friends, bought sweets from vendors, listened to a band of flutes, and sat on a bench above the Nile, watching parties on pleasure boats.

"You look lovely in that shawl," said Pankh.

"Father is always coming home with some extraordinary gift," she said nervously. "Pankh? Up on the rooftop? It almost sounded as if you were threatening Father."

"Silly goose," said Pankh. "I just reminded him that I always get what I want."

Renifer was horrified. He was begging a god to lash out and prove him wrong. Or a goddess. "But you treated Sekhmet as a weapon," she whispered. She felt herself at the top of something as high as the Pyramid, and as steep; felt herself falling, and falling with her was a shape so terrible she must keep her eyes closed and her thoughts protected.

"A weapon?" Pankh laughed. "I was just juggling it around." He snapped his fingers to show how little he cared for the goddess. "If I need a weapon, I have a knife."

"But Pankh—"

"I have reached the end of my patience," said Pankh sharply. "I do not care for a wife who questions my decisions."

What decisions? thought Renifer. I don't even know what we're talking about.

"I'm sorry," she said humbly, but she was afraid.

Her father and her beloved were hiding something, using a goddess who would gladly destroy them with one swipe of her immortal paw.

Evil was coming, and Renifer was powerless to get out of its way.

II



Time to Fall

ANNIE: 1999

Suddenly the special Egyptian exhibition exploded with schoolchildren. Seventh graders, possibly eighth. Filled with the noisy excitement of a field trip, they had not the slightest intention of learning anything. They rattled around the exhibition while their teacher read aloud from placards.

So she was not going to change centuries.

Strat had done that for her. He was here. In her time.

Annie wanted to touch Strat as tenderly as they had touched a hundred years ago. How perfect he still looked. He wore cargo pants and a navy sweater heavily knitted in braids and whorls. He could have been a young sailor from some Irish island, whose sister or mother had been knitting all winter to create this masterpiece. Strat's hair was the same moppy annoying badly cut hair she had known a hundred years ago. He had worn a cute little cap then, the kind men wore when they drove automobiles with open tops and running boards.

Annie had a moment of regret. Other times were so much more exciting and romantic. Neither word could ever be used to describe the suburbs of New York City. She had bought the adventure outfit not to travel into New York, but to travel into 1899. And now she wouldn't get to go.

A yelling knot of boys jostled them, and then an elbowing cluster of girls. Their teacher raised her voice and loudly proclaimed her views of ancient Egyptian art. The class scattered in all directions.

The boy Strat was paying more attention to the photograph than to Annie. Finally he said to Annie, "I think you're right." He smiled in a friendly bland way, only half looking at her. A shock wave went through Annie Lockwood.

He did not know her. She was going to have to introduce herself to a boy whose smile and hair and kiss she remembered so well. "What am I right about?" she said weakly. "I don't see Strat in the picture."

“Stratton was the photographer, remember, so he isn’t in any of the pictures. But I’m curious. How do you know about Stratton?”

Annie never thought of him as Stratton. To her, he had always been Strat. To a boy who did not remember her, however, she could hardly say, “I used to date you, a hundred years ago.” So she said, “I read that Strat left his home in America and went to Egypt.”

“Where did you read that?” asked the boy excitedly. “Because our family has tried to find out more about him. You see, Stratton was my great-grandmother’s brother. His full name was Hiram Stratton, Jr.”

That’s what you think, thought Annie Lockwood. *You* are Hiram Stratton, Jr.

Then his words sank in. This boy’s great-grandmother was the *sister* of Strat. That would be Devonny. So he wasn’t Annie’s Strat at all. He had not come through Time. He was nothing but the descendant of a sister. Some distant cousin killing time in a museum. Oh, surely not! Time wouldn’t do that to her.

“We have other photos that Stratton took, also in Egypt,” said the boy, “but he didn’t leave many trails for us to follow. We don’t know what happened to him later. What book did you read it in?”

She hadn’t read it anywhere. She’d been there. “What is your name again?” she asked.

“They call me Strat. But my real name is Lockwood Stratton.”

Annie Lockwood nearly fell over. He possessed *her* last name as *his* first name? That could not be coincidence.

Eighth-grade boys swarmed like hornets around the gold Sekhmet, bumping into Strat’s knees and Annie’s back.

“We can’t concentrate on the exhibition until this class has moved on,” said Annie. “Want to go to the museum cafeteria and have a dessert with me? I’d love to hear about your family. You see”—she considered a reasonable lie—“I think we have a photograph of Strat’s too.”

“You talk as if you know him,” teased the boy. “He died a hundred years ago, you know.”

“He lived a hundred years ago,” Annie corrected him.

They walked down the magnificent stairs, which made Annie feel like a princess in a palace. The boy tapped one of the names incised on the walls: *Hiram Stratton, Sr.* “My great-great-grandfather,” he said.

A man Annie had encountered another time. The cruelest man she had ever met. A man who had sworn to destroy his own son—and had. A man who had sworn to destroy the mother of his own children—and had. A man who ...

Annie's head swam. A veil came between her and the names of the donors. The letters fell off the walls and onto her face like hail, pelting her with memory.

Time opened like a cellar door, for her to fall into blackness.

Hiram Stratton even now was planning to
destroy ... *something* ... *someone* ...

Her feet slipped on the marble steps.

It had been this way before. A first falling, then a second. Then, at last, the step through Time. Scudding across the years like a ship in a high wind.

A guard leaned his face into hers. How antique his features, how dark and wind-beaten his glance. For a moment, the guard stood on the far side of Time. But then he was just a museum employee. Had she skipped breakfast? he wanted to know. He didn't want her to faint and fall on the stone steps and hurt herself.

"I caught her," said the boy, putting his arm around her. Annie knew that hand. The hand on Annie's shoulder was Strat's hand. "She's fine," he told the guard. "We're on our way to the cafeteria anyway. I'll see she has something to eat."

He pulled Annie to her feet and they walked on together, not touching. Not touching him made her ache. She had known the ache before, too. This was Strat. The real thing. Not a distant cousin.

Time! she called silently. Strat's here. Forget what I asked for. I don't want to change centuries after all. I don't need to anymore. You can leave.

But she had called upon Time too strongly.

Time, having listened, would answer.

KATIE: 1899

Katie washed out the teacups, which she had borrowed from Mother Superior when she found she had a guest. A guest who offered to save her, bring her home and even provide her with an income!

But with what speed Miss Camilla Matthews had departed. Having squinted at Strat's letters, she was done. She did not care about seeing Douglass, nor did she wish a tour of the hospital.

I trusted her, thought Katie. Here among nuns, I let myself believe that being a woman makes a person good. I, with my childhood! I know that gender does not predict goodness.

Katie beat her fists on the tiny tea table. Then she ripped off her veil and sobbed into her hands. At St. Rafael, she was usually at peace with the Lord and the cruelly formed body into which He had placed her. Now she felt assaulted. This woman—girl, really, hardly older than Katie herself—had connived and lied and encouraged Katie to expose the thoughts of her heart.

It wouldn't be Devonny trying to find Strat. If Strat wished to communicate with Devonny, he could do so—and probably had.

It was Hiram Stratton, Sr., who had enough money and interest to send a woman across the ocean to ply Katie with falsehoods.

Hiram Stratton, Sr., could not tolerate defeat. He did not care who had to be crushed as long as he was the victor. Not only had his one and only son talked back and offered unusual opinions, but then the boy refused to marry Harriett, whose hand Mr. Stratton had chosen for Strat. First among virtues in a son was absolute obedience. When Strat failed to display it, Mr. Stratton put him in an asylum so that his will would be broken.

Katie herself had heard the asylum doctor read aloud the letters he wrote to Mr. Stratton, describing how Strat whimpered and cringed like a

kicked dog. But Mr. Stratton had not won, in the end, for by fair means or foul, Strat had defeated both the asylum and his father.

What destruction might come to Strat now, at the hands of this Camilla Matthews?

Katie composed a cable, telegrams being a marvel of technology. Why, this cable would arrive in Egypt long before Miss Matthews could even find a ship! Truly, the nineteenth century was a magnificent time. Katie trembled to think of the twentieth, only weeks away, and what might be invented in those decades.

STRAT. DANGER. MY FAULT. IMMEDIATELY LEAVE EGYPT. YOUR FATHER IN PURSUIT. HIS AGENT A WOMAN, CAMILLA MATTHEWS. LETTER FOLLOWS. LOVE KATIE.

She took the carefully printed telegram and more than enough money to cover the cost of sending it to Cairo and went to the gate of the hospital. The gate was not to keep patients in, but to warn strangers away.

She had not left since the day Strat sailed. His letters were her only door to the world. And now, stepping beyond the pale, she remembered the world!

The profile of a Moorish castle and a row of green cedars. An ancient Roman aqueduct against a blue sky and a street market down the hill, full of children and laughter. The clop of horses' hoofs and the clatter of wagon wheels called her name.

What temptation to give up her cause and walk away from her patients into sunshine and safety. Beyond the beautiful city lay a gleaming sea. She herself could carry the warning to Strat. He had been a true friend, such a few on earth ever have.

But if Katie went to him, she would be a burden. Strat would have to figure out what to do with her ... when there was nothing to do with her.

Katie prayed. The Lord strengthened her.

Then she called out to a friendly-looking passerby. She spoke in Spanish, of course, having learned it easily. She was proud of her accent. "Will you deliver a cable to the telegram office, please? Here is plenty of money, and a good tip as well."

The man pointed to the ground halfway between them. Katie set down her precious warning, piling coins on top so the wind would not blow the page away. She gave the man God's blessing and returned to the enclosure.

When she had shut the gate behind her, tears assaulted her: for herself and for all ruined lives. And while she prayed for calmness of heart, the man in the street walked on without pausing. Nothing would make him handle what a leper had touched.

A wagon passed by. The wheels sent the coins flying into the dust and tore the cable in half. Later a child found one of the coins and bought food.

ARCHIBALD LIGHTNER: 1899

Archibald Lightner was furious. He had enough to do without having to go into Cairo and rescue his foolish photographer. “I’ve half a mind to fire you,” he said when he finally stomped into the French embassy. “You can’t even do a decent watercolor.”

“I’m the photographer,” the boy protested. “I never said I could paint.”

“Well, then, you should be more versatile,” snapped Archibald Lightner. His dig was full of stupid people. Of course, he was of the opinion that most people were stupid, but one always hoped to avoid them. Or at least not hire them.

“Actually,” said the boy, “you aren’t paying me anything.”

Dr. Lightner remembered now. Something to do with a leper colony. The boy certainly looked healthy. In fact, he looked perfect. Archibald, who was beaky, gawky and gaunt, had always wanted to look like this young man. Bronze and strong, like a Greek statue. Archibald resembled a heron.

“What is your full name, anyway?” he said irritably. He had searched the boy’s possessions, hoping to find a passport, but paperwork was not required at most borders, and it did not look as if the boy possessed any. In fact, other than love letters from a girl named Katie, the boy possessed virtually nothing.

I don’t know a thing about him, thought Dr. Lightner. Perhaps I should request that he move on. If I give him money, he will be eager to do so. On the other hand, I pay him nothing, and in exchange he gives me fine photographs.

“I cannot lie to you, sir,” said the boy, his cheeks turning red. “I must tell you my full name, although I beg that you not use it. I am Hiram Stratton, Jr.”

“Your father is Hiram Stratton?” Archibald Lightner was astonished. He had perceived the camera boy as a servant, just above the natives who

toted rubble. Hiram Stratton was one of those astonishing Americans who had achieved inconceivable wealth, and now, bored by wives and mansions, was giving it away. People were lined up, hoping their museum or hospital or library might be handed a vast sum.

Archibald Lightner considered how he might spend a vast sum. Quickly and enjoyably, he decided.

“How is it that the son of Hiram Stratton has no possessions except a change of clothing and a camera?” asked Dr. Lightner. “Are you being fully honest in this matter?”

“My father and I are estranged,” said the boy stiffly. “I do not possess a dime of his, nor do I anticipate a return to his household.”

“You will pardon the insult implied by my next remark, Mr. Stratton.” (For he could not continue to address the youth as if he were mere staff.) “But when a young son is so deeply estranged, one must wonder if the son committed misdeeds so great that he dare not return to the bosom of his family.”

The French, who were always committing misdeeds so great that they dare not return to the bosom of their families, liked Strat better now.

Strat flushed deeply. “I ask you, sir. Is it not possible that the misdeeds were committed by the father? Perhaps the son has chosen a life in which he and his father’s misdeeds will not collide.”

The French were satisfied. Not only was the young man from a fine family, he cast off wealth as if it mattered not. He was morally above his own parent, refusing to be stained by his father. It was worthy of an opera.

The attaché said, “We accept, *monsieur*, that our two citizens were careless and caused their own deaths. We regret this unfortunate episode here in Cairo, Mr. Stratton.” There was bowing and nodding and stroking of mustaches.

They patted the Stratton heir on the shoulder as he left.

Dr. Lightner was not so quick to believe in the boy. All America knew that Hiram Stratton, Sr., had done evil things en route to becoming rich.

The apple, thought Archibald Lightner, does not fall far from the tree. Hiram Stratton, Jr., might travel halfway around the world to escape being his father’s son, but he is still his father’s son. And that means he has the capacity for evil.

ANNIE: 1999

In the center of each table in the museum restaurant were folding paper pyramids describing the exhibit. Annie yearned to keep one. Should she ask the waitress and risk being refused, or just quietly fold it up and slip it into her purse?

The tables were jammed next to one another. Inches away, an elderly couple argued hotly about the same problem. “Fine,” said the husband testily, “steal one.”

His wife glared at him and tucked the paper pyramid into her purse. “It isn’t stealing, Albert. It’s a souvenir. Besides, lunch was expensive.”

“It’s stealing,” said the husband, as if he might summon New York’s Finest, arrest his wife, and be done with it.

The boy was laughing. “That’s the thing about marriage,” he whispered to Annie. “The decades pile up and so do tempers.”

“Tell me about it,” said Annie. “But sometimes they rescue themselves. My parents left today on their second honeymoon.”

“Really? How nice. Did they get married again and everything?”

Annie nodded. “My mother went on a killer diet so she could fit into her wedding gown again, and Dad into his same tux. My brother was best man and I was maid of honor. We even had the same guests. It was fun in an embarrassing kind of way.” She skipped the part about the affair her father had promised to abandon. Who knew whether to believe him? But Mom believed, and it was her marriage.

She said, “I remember that Hiram Stratton, Sr., made a fortune in railroads. I never knew he was a philanthropist.” If I could touch your hair, she thought, I would know whether you are my Strat.

But they were sitting opposite each other in a public place and he thought they were strangers. “The family legend is that Hiram Stratton, Sr., disowned Hiram Stratton, Jr., because Junior went insane. Junior took

up gentle Victorian activities like watercolors and eventually went to Egypt for a rest cure. He took a few photographs for the Lightner dig and then—who knows?”

They called him Strat, not Junior, thought Annie. And he wasn't insane. He loved me. Of course, my brother, Tod, would call that insane. “So you're Devonny's great-grandchild,” she said instead.

“You make it sound as if you and Grandmother Devonny met,” he said, laughing.

We did, thought Annie. She sent me on a mission, to save Strat from the asylum. But it went wrong in the end, and we had to part.

“Devonny Stratton married an Englishman,” he explained. “They had two children. The older son became an earl or something, but the younger son came back to America and called himself Lockwood Stratton. His son, my father, was plain old Bill Stratton, and now I'm Lockwood Stratton again. Ridiculous British-type name, huh?”

No. Lockwood was not a ridiculous British-type name.

It was a ridiculous American-type name. Annie's.

Annie folded and unfolded the paper pyramid to distract herself. She swallowed her latte. She loved the puffy creaminess and the soft sugar at the bottom. “I'm a Lockwood myself. My name is Annie Lockwood. It would be,” she said carefully, “somebody in my family that Devonny got the name from.” Because I tried to save Strat, she thought. And maybe I did. I've never really known.

“That is so terrific! Then we're related, in a nonrelated kind of way.”

He had Strat's smile. The one that said, This is the best day and you are the best person to spend it with.

The second falling came.

She gripped the tiny restaurant table and did not fall completely. It was more the dizziness that hits anyone from time to time: a skidding of the mind, the tires of your thoughts on black ice. She could not quite see the boy's face, and could not quite remember Strat's, and then it was over, and Lockwood Stratton was studying the bill.

“What's my share?” said Annie thickly.

“Please let me pay. I'm getting a kick out of this. I love that we're both Lockwoods.”

RENIFER: IN THE TWENTIETH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF KHUFU, LORD OF THE TWO LANDS

The great torches along the polished causeway had been lit. The avenue past the temples and up to the Pyramid gleamed in the night. The wind off the desert grew cold.

The tomb robbers held no grudge against Hetepheres. They hoped she would have eternal life. They assumed, however, that she would be fine without her jewels.

They had been robbing her tomb for several nights now, having chipped away the plaster that hid the entrance. Her little mortuary chapel had potted palms and ferns, watered by temple servants. Now there were many more, watered by tomb robbers, which after their night's work, the thieves slid over the stones to hide the forced entry.

They had taken from the tomb most of the smaller items and were now considering how to take the larger ones.

Using levers, they tipped up the lid of the great stone sarcophagus. In it would rest the finest jewels, lying next to and on top of the mummy. The queen's *ka* would be flying around, frantic and angry, but they had been robbing tombs for generations. No man yet had been hurt by a *ka*—only by priests who thought they were above bribery.

It took some time to maneuver the two-ton stone lid out of the way. They balanced it crosswise on the rim of the sarcophagus and hoisted out the light wooden coffin. They removed an immense gold pectoral of vulture's wings, solid with jasper and lapis lazuli. Somebody's wife or daughter would look magnificent in the morning.

Of course, she would have to look magnificent in private, until the gold was melted down and molded into something that could not be recognized. But melting down stolen gold was a daily activity, like baking bread or netting fish.

If Pharaoh caught them, He would have them impaled. But the robbers merely found this exciting. They did not expect Pharaoh to be told. Sufficient bribes had been paid for many nights of privacy. The guardians of the City of the Dead were always happy to receive gold. The priests who served the dead queen her daily meals were also satisfied by gold.

That was the thing about gold. Everybody wanted it and everybody was satisfied by it.

Except when they wanted more.

ANNIE: 1999

The third falling was hideous and wrong.

Even as it was happening, Annie knew that only bad things could come of this. She would suffer—and worse, she would cause others to suffer.

She saw the boy's eyes open wide, saw his puzzlement.

She tried to call to him, but Time peeled them apart.

Decades ripped at her hair and years tore her skin. She gained velocity. Passing years heaved around her like earthquakes. Annie was screaming, but her voice was torn from her throat by the wind of Time. Her fingertips scraped along centuries, her body bruised by millennia.

Stop, begged Annie. You're taking me too far. If Strat is out there, he's in 1899.

But she was merely mortal and had no weapons.

Time possessed them all.

HIRAM STRATTON, SR.: 1899

“Ah, Mr. Stratton,” said the museum trustee, “such a delight to lunch with you.”

Actually, he found Hiram Stratton appalling. The man had grown so obese from fine food and liquor that his belly jutted into a room like the prow of a tugboat. The immense mustache was groomed and waxed, the teeth yellow from nicotine, and the pipe clenched in the jaw gave off a noxious odor. The eyes were too small for the lumpy face, and blinked too seldom, as with a shark. Below the small beard, the starched white collar was crushed by the weight of jowls and chin.

The museum had opened an American Wing, which embarrassed the trustee, since Americans were not capable of producing art. The museum should contain only *actual* art—Italian oil paintings or Greek statues. Perhaps Mr. Stratton had been coaxed into believing in the existence of American art.

No doubt the man wanted his name on a plaque or a door. The trustee shuddered to think of his beloved museum stained by the name of this family. Must I have anything to do with this revolting person? thought the trustee, resenting his assignment.

“I am thinking,” said Hiram Stratton, Sr., “of giving several million dollars to the Egyptian collection.”

The trustee was passionate about the Egyptian collection. He loved pyramids and the Nile, papyrus and tombs. He found he didn’t care as much about the Stratton name as he had a moment ago. “Archaeology is expensive, dear sir. One must have quite a staff. We, of course, sponsor Dr. Archibald Lightner, who even now is working at the foot of the Great Pyramid. Naturally you have read his gripping books.”

Personally the trustee didn’t think Mr. Stratton could read. But the man could count. Millions at a time. What that money could do for the

Egyptian collection!

And it was imperative to remove antiquities from Egypt swiftly, because the country was making noises about wanting to keep them for itself! Absurd. To think of leaving such treasures with mere Egyptians!

“I wish,” said Mr. Stratton, “to visit the excavation prior to making my gift.”

The trustee imagined Mr. Stratton flattening little Egyptian donkeys. “How thrilled Dr. Lightner will be to have a man of your stature visit,” he lied.

Mr. Stratton had a peculiar request. He did not wish his name used. Dr. Archibald Lightner was merely to know that an important donor was arriving. In fact, Hiram Stratton would arrange his visit through another group entirely. “My dear sir,” said the trustee, confused, for there was but one reason to give money—to be applauded by one’s friends—“surely you want your name in the papers.”

“When one has wealth, one is forced to take precautions,” said Hiram Stratton.

In other words, thought the trustee, the factory fire haunts you. Somebody out there would like to cut you to pieces. “It is a sorrowful world,” he said, “when gentlemen such as yourself must deal with an ungrateful public.”

CAMILLA: 1899

Camilla was astonished to find that Egypt was overrun by tourists.

She met hunters eager to bag a crocodile, collectors of mummies, explorers of rivers and invalids in sedan chairs hoping to bake themselves healthy. Hordes of British officers were exploring Cairo and Giza and Saqqara before joining the attack at Khartoum.

Camilla pretended that a handsome British officer—no, a *titled* handsome British officer—would fall in love with her and beg for her hand in marriage.

But the British were even shorter than the Americans. Camilla towered over every man in sight.

She had come as a newspaperwoman, Duffie having obtained a fake assignment for Miss Camilla Matthews. Camilla, with a mass of other tourists, approached the Pyramids. The donkey she rode was small and plump and hung with tassels. She had to hold her feet up so they did not scrape the ground.

Nothing had prepared her for the sight of the Pyramids.

She knew there were two million two-ton rocks in Khufu's Pyramid, but to see them! To gaze up and up and up, stunned by the actual accumulation of all those stones, and each its own color of gold; the Egyptian sun beating down until every angle and corner burned with fire.

Oh, thought Camilla, to have known the man—or god—who thought to build this monument.

The Pyramid was clustered with climbers: two or three natives in billowing white robes vaulting easily from stone to stone, and then reaching out long brown hands to haul up an exhausted and sweating tourist. In every language came their cries of encouragement: "*Allez-y doucement!*" "*Dem halben-weg!*" "*Pazienza, signora!*"

The wind lifted sand and flung it in her face, leaving her skin raw and stung. Just so had Camilla flung lies at Katie. Camilla felt as sick in her gut as if she had been drinking from the Nile. Far worse, she had drunk from the example of Hiram Stratton.

She, Camilla Mateusz, had trespassed on a saint.

Life had already used Katie so badly. What right had Camilla to use her?

I had to! Camilla told herself. It was necessary to find the son, and through the son punish the father! I must shrug about it.

But she knew herself to be infected, from her rage toward the father and her daily practice of lying and cheating and conniving for Mr. Duffie.

Camilla strode on. The walking was difficult. The Giza plateau was nothing but sand and stone broken by centuries of weather and feet and by decades of excavation. Her chestnut leather boots were scratched by shards and rubble. Fine clothing was a good thing, but better was a clean heart, she thought.

Quarrying had taken place everywhere, giving the plateau an odd geometry, with so many squares cut away over the millennia. The passage of so much time allowed Camilla to shrug. Who cared about a clean heart? She cared about money, and if it was dirty, so be it. It would still feed her brothers and sisters.

Several hundred feet beyond the Pyramids and the Sphinx was a tent city: headquarters of Dr. Lightner's dig. Fenced off by posts and a single frayed rope, it was guarded by an Egyptian in a long swirling robe of chocolate brown. He was armed—a rifle on his shoulder, a pistol at his waist and a knife literally in his teeth. Camilla loved him. He was treasure and greed, adventure and attack.

Her letter of introduction to Dr. Archibald Lightner—her false letter, designed by Hiram Stratton himself—moved Camilla past the barricade.

The great man sat under an awning and behind a table littered with shards of rock and pottery. He looked at her with dislike, read the letter and sighed. "Miss Matthews, I prefer not to deal with females. Their educations are poor and their presence distracting."

Camilla, whose education was indeed poor, and who planned to be a major distraction, could not argue.

In spite of his opinion of females, however, Archibald Lightner obeyed the rules of courtesy and got to his feet. And now the word great was

appropriate. Archibald Lightner was six-and-a-half-feet tall.

Camilla made an instant decision to marry him.

Plenty of women married for money. It couldn't be worse to choose a husband by height. Of course, age was a problem. He had to be twenty years older than Camilla. Possibly thirty. But who cared? He was taller. "I have never been accused of being low to the ground, sir. And I shall not be a nuisance. I shall be the best publicity you can buy. My article will generate large donations. An archaeologist can never have too much money."

Dr. Lightner laughed. It was a rusty sound, as one who rarely encounters anything comic. Making him laugh was how she would accomplish his proposal of marriage. Camilla gave herself a deadline, as if he were a newspaper article. Three weeks, she said to herself, and he will ask for my hand. She looked *up* into his eyes: the first time in her life that a man's eyes were above her own.

"Miss Matthews," he said reluctantly, "how may I begin your instruction?"

She pointed to the Pyramids. "I want desperately to ascend. I spent the voyage reading about Egypt and have yearned for this moment. Must I hire assistance like other tourists? I am strong and accustomed to playing ball games. Might I climb alone?"

He was puzzled, as if she were a hieroglyph not yet deciphered. "No, madam. A lady mustn't attempt the ascent alone. She might grow fatigued from heat or lose her balance and topple."

Camilla had never lost her balance and toppled; not when her father died; not when she masqueraded as a man; not when she visited a leper hospital. She did not plan to topple from a Pyramid either. But women did not contradict great men, nor receive marriage proposals by being strong.

"I will take you," he said suddenly, surprising her; perhaps surprising himself; definitely surprising his staff, who took a second glance at the female in their midst.

They approached the base of the Pyramid. Camilla touched one of the great yellowing stones. She swayed from the impact of such antiquity. She felt she almost knew the men who had piled these stones. Knew their wives and children, their gods and dreams.

"Are you faint already?" demanded the great man irritably.

"I am overcome not by heat, but by history. Not by weakness, but by strength." Camilla caught Dr. Lightner's arm. "Tell me how the stones were quarried and moved. Tell me who was here. Tell me how they lived."

He stared at her as if she were an artifact. "Put your hat back on," he said gruffly. "Fasten the scarf. You must be shaded from the glare." He tightened the chin strap on his own stiff, wide-brimmed hat and took her hand to help her up. She did need help, as her skirt proved confining. Dr. Lightner could vault easily up to the next level, from whence he would reach down to grip her hand, and lean backward. Up the tautness of his body she would scramble. She felt her arm would be pulled from its socket with every yank. She bruised her shin and banged her elbow, but gave no sign, unwilling to ask for rest.

"From the top, Miss Matthews, you will see for miles because the land is flat and the air so clear. You will comprehend this area as one vast graveyard. You will see the floor plan, so to speak: the causeway, the quadrangles of lesser tombs and the remains of minor pyramids."

Twice he dusted her off, apologizing for the intimacy of this act. Once Camilla dusted him off. She was thorough. She did not apologize.

"Tell me," said Dr. Lightner. "What reading did you do to prepare for this article you will write about me?"

"I began of course with your own three books," said Camilla, having purchased them from American tourists who didn't care if they ever heard another word about Egypt again. "My favorite is volume two, in which you discourse about the current events in Egypt as compared to the upheavals of Egypt's magnificent past."

He said casually, as one to whom the topic is of minor interest, "I am preparing volume four."

"Dr. Lightner! What an honor it would be were I permitted to gaze at your first draft."

They reached the summit. Two or three stones of the final tier remained, creating shade and seating. It might have been designed for tired ladies and handsome men to rest and eat an orange. Dr. Lightner had a tin canteen hanging at his waist, and they shared sips of water. Her lips rested where his had been and now when their eyes met, his dropped first.

In the distance was Cairo with minarets and towers. Closer were farms of emerald green, split by canals, dotted with camels and donkeys moving

down dusty lanes.

Peace descended over Camilla.

It was not possible to think of revenge and rage. Perhaps rage and revenge had once occurred in Egypt, but today it was serene and Camilla was part of the eternally repeating life of that eternal river.

“This is the stage of a great theater, isn’t it?” Camilla said softly. “Cairo is the audience. A million people are crammed into the auditorium that is Egypt.”

“How beautifully you expressed that.” Dr. Lightner pointed to a line as sharp as an edge of paper that divided the green fields from the yellow desert. “Look there. Fields and sand are not friends,” he told her. “They march up to each other and neither will surrender. That sand extends from the Nile to Morocco! To the Atlantic Ocean itself.”

“I should like to travel from oasis to oasis with my camel train,” said Camilla, “and meet the Bedouin.”

“Yes! And write an article about it! I will help you arrange it.” He took her hand for a different purpose than hauling her upward. He took it, she thought, from excitement. From looking forward to her company. He held her hand flat between both of his, as in Egyptian wall paintings.

An emotion as ageless as revenge entered Camilla’s heart. She knew suddenly what could cause a lady to lose her balance and topple.

Falling in love.

STRAT: 1899

Twice that day, Strat felt the presence of Annie. Twice he reached into thin air, thinking to grasp her and haul her through to him. Twice he caught only the wind.

She is near, he thought, but a year or a century divides us.

He could have wept or screamed or even thrown himself off the Pyramid, but he managed to laugh and go on taking photographs of tourists and saving the money to send to Katie.

The third time he so intensely felt the presence of Annie, he lost his grip on the heavy wooden tripod that held his camera. It tipped to the side, falling heavily against a pile of stones. Oh, no! If his camera were broken ...

Strat's heart sank.

But what was damaged was the stone.

Impossible. A stick of wood could not break stone. Strat kicked the stone with his boot—and it broke. He picked up a piece and rubbed it—and it turned to white dust in his palm.

It was plaster.

Who would apply plaster to a stone in the desert?

Strat opened his penknife and stabbed experimentally at the stones around him. He was surrounded by plaster. He, Strat, was standing on the entrance to a tomb. Some royal tomb had been camouflaged by that plaster for thousands of years, and *he*—not the brilliant archaeologists! not the scholars! not the historians!—*he*, Strat, had found it.

I'll be famous. I, Hiram Stratton, Jr.—

—but he did not want anyone else knowing he was Hiram Stratton, Jr. Already he felt vulnerable and anxious, because Archibald Lightner knew the truth. What if word spread?

Father, thought Strat ruefully, you have truly followed me to the grave. Luckily, it isn't *my* grave. And though I dare not take credit, for publicity would tell you where I am, at least I can take photographs.

He could not wait to tell Dr. Lightner. He ran across the sand and rubble to the dig and saw, several hundred yards away, Dr. Lightner talking with a tall slim girl in a long romantic skirt.

Annie had come.

The other night when he climbed to the top of the Pyramid, he *had* reached her. Time *had* let his prayer cross the century.

His body leaped forward and his heart followed. He soared toward her, as an eagle soars on rising heat. He plunged over the crevasse where some archaeologist was digging in the hope of finding a buried tomb ship. He raced over trenches where yet another hoped to find a queen's tomb. He could not slow his steps and he certainly could not slow his heart.

And when he arrived, plunging down a slope, leaping from rock crest to sand hill, he saw that the girl had blond hair.

Annie's was dark.

CAMILLA: 1899

“Let us descend,” said Dr. Lightner at last. “There is work to do.”
Down was easier than up. There were fewer occasions on which it was necessary to cling to each other. Camilla could not bring herself, an athlete, to pretend she needed help when she did not.

Halfway down Dr. Lightner said, “Tell me what sort of ball games you delight in.”

She was touched that he had been paying attention to her from the first. “Basketball. Have you ever had the pleasure?”

“Oh, yes! We play basketball here for amusement. My young men all played for their colleges. How your team must relish you! You are so magnificently tall.”

Camilla stared at Dr. Lightner’s weathered face. Sun had burned it to bronze and split it in cracks.

They walked slowly toward the tents, finding much to say. How marvelous to be with a man who was not letting go of her hand. How marvelous, in fact, were hands.

A boy about Camilla’s own age suddenly came bounding and yelling toward them.

Camilla was pretending to be thirty, which seemed like the right age for a seasoned reporter sent halfway across the world to write about scientific events, but in fact, she was seventeen. The boy too had the air of somebody pretending to be older, but in fact, still in his teens.

She had the oddest sense that he was racing toward *her*. That they knew each other. She even had the thought that she shocked him; that he was not prepared for the sight of her.

It was not until he pulled up next to them, breathless and excited, that Camilla saw he was astonishingly handsome and very unkempt. His jacket

was in desperate need of button reattachment and his trousers needed mending.

“Dr. Lightner! Sir!” he cried. “I have found an undiscovered tomb.”

Camilla laughed out loud at this pathetic claim. It was surely the daydream of every tourist: I’ll stoop down, find pottery with hieroglyphs, kick away a rock and expose a tomb, which will be filled with gold.

“I knocked over my tripod whilst preparing my camera,” said the boy. “The wooden legs are heavy and topped with brass casings. They hit against a desert stone and when I looked, it was not stone at all, but plaster camouflaged as a rock!”

Dr. Lightner quivered. “Perhaps I should take a look.”

He and the boy walked with measured pace, though Camilla thought they wanted to fly through the air, dive into the sand and come flailing to the surface with their arms full of Egyptian gold.

In moments, the entire expedition was trooping along, whispering and wondering. What a gathering of fine young men! Camilla gathered that these were intellectuals from the great universities of the world, taking six months or a year to indulge a passion for archaeology. She wondered what it could be like to have the money to do such a thing.

“What is the significance of the plaster?” she asked one of them.

“In my studies at Yale,” he told her, “I learned that in ancient times, the entry to a tomb was often disguised with plaster dyed to match the desert.”

It did not seem to Camilla it had been necessary to wedge Yale into the response. She decided that she, in turn, would wedge an important women’s college into the conversation, as if she too recalled tidbits from otherwise dull lectures.

“You are a lucky reporter, Miss Matthews,” said one of the young men. “A real scoop. What an article you will write!”

Camilla was horrified. She didn’t know a thing about reporting. She had planned to fake all that.

“What newspaper are you from?” asked the Yale man. “Boston?” he said. “New York?” It had to be one of these; no other city mattered.

“I’m from Kansas,” she said, preparing to hand him the fake card she had had printed up to support her fake credentials.

They burst into uproarious laughter at the idea that people in Kansas could read, or even printed newspapers.

Furious and embarrassed, Camilla took pad and pencil from her satchel and pushed her way to the front. Ladies did have a few advantages in this world. No man would think of pushing back.

A few taps of the chisel and it was established that behind the plaster were flat stones, easily dragged aside, and below them ... a man-made rectangle. The entrance, perhaps, to the shaft of a tomb.

Dr. Lightner stood for the boy to photograph him above the unopened site. He contained his excitement poorly. He could not stay motionless for the lengthy time a photograph required.

Camilla found she had already written three paragraphs.

The removal of rubble from the shaft began.

The Egyptians were told to work faster, but that did not occur. They had a tempo. They did not rush. After all, thought Camilla, the rocks have been there five thousand years. It's Americans who rush.

Long before they had made much progress, the shadows were too thick for work to go on. People sighed, agreeing to leave the rest for the morrow, and went sadly and separately to their tents.

Camilla, however, approached the boy. She was amazed by his physical beauty. Burnished by the Egyptian sun, the youth shone. He had retreated over the sand, and was facing the Sphinx, but his thoughts were clearly on a tiny envelope in his hand.

The envelope was not two inches long, the color of an American sky before an autumn storm: gray with tints of angry yellow. He held it to his lips. It was not a kiss, more a communion.

Communion.

She was Camilla Mateusz again, thinking of all the Sundays in this wicked year in which she had not gone to Mass and had not taken Communion and had not been a good person. Her eyes blurred with shame.

The boy put the envelope in his shirt pocket, so that it lay over his heart. Uncertainly, Camilla interrupted and was met by a sweet half-smile.

"Might we sit upon one of the Pyramid stones and talk to each other?" asked Camilla. "If you are willing, tell me the details of your discovery for my article."

They circled the Sphinx. The serpent charmers had packed up, the watermelon vendors were sold out and the tables of souvenirs had vanished. The boy took her arm as if they were off to a dance, and they

walked over a vast pavement, tilted now by the ravages of Time, and arrived at Khufu's Pyramid.

The best spot was several stones up and they climbed together. "Girls can't usually swing up like that!" he said respectfully. "I've known only one."

"What was her name?" asked Camilla.

"Annie." His voice was so soft she could hardly hear. He traced the outline of the tiny envelope in his pocket.

"What is that in your pocket?" she asked. Working for Duffie had destroyed her inhibition against asking about people's private lives. She must remember that ladies did not pry. Of course, reporters always pried. Perhaps she could not be both.

He answered with courtesy. "Once, long ago, I loved a young lady. We left each other. There was no choice in the matter. All I have of her, and all I ever will, is a lock of her hair."

He carried that girl's token against his heart. Camilla's own heart was assaulted. Would any man ever feel that way toward her? She could not prevent a prayerful vision of herself and Dr. Lightner together, and had to blush at such foolishness. A great scholar? Interested in a half-educated girl, half his age, pretending to be a reporter?

Perhaps she really could be a reporter. Then there would be one true thing in her life. She would not entirely be a tissue of lies. "You and I were never introduced," she said. "I must have your name for my article so that you may receive credit for finding the shaft. I am Miss Camilla Matthews, newspaper reporter from Kansas."

"Really?" he said with interest. "Tell me about Kansas."

Camilla had never been west of New York City, so her answers lacked validity, but Strat repeated her words carefully. He would probably carry them around all his life.

"This has been a lovely night," he said then. "Allow me to escort you to the tent that Dr. Lightner has arranged for you, Miss Matthews."

"I still do not know your name, sir."

"You need not use my name in your article, Miss Matthews."

She was astonished. "This discovery could be your future."

He shook his head, not interested in his future.

“What shall I call you then, since I am to stay at your camp for some time?” She extended her hand, firmly and in a masculine fashion, so he would not become confused and think she wanted to lean on him.

“People call me Strat,” he said finally.

The son of the man who had murdered her father shook Camilla’s hand.

III



Time to Fear

ANNIE

Reeds as thick as Annie's wrist, but unnaturally shaped in triangles—like no plant on earth she had ever heard of—towered around and above her. Lacy fronds and leaves closed out the sky. Fat roots fondled the mud in which they grew, and the mud caught her toes and sucked at her heels.

Birds shrieked. Water lapped. A cloud of purple dragonflies needled past and a frog vaulted out of the water, its wet skin brushing her ankle.

Annie had never known such heat. Sweat poured off her, soaking through her clothes. A white-winged heron rose languidly in front of her, as if half-asleep; as if all creatures, herself included, could not fully waken in this heat.

Gripping the heavy stems—trunks, almost—of the reeds, she tried to find her way out. Out of what? she thought, trying not to sink into terror as she was sinking into mud. Into what?

Leaves as hot as if they had been fried slapped her in the face. The air was so thick with moisture that no matter how deeply she breathed, she failed to find enough oxygen.

"Strat!" she screamed, for he must be here. The only reason Time had hurled her here—wherever she was—was to find Strat.

Nobody answered.

Huge rotting plants rimmed the edges of deep water. She could find no land, no solid earth. To break through these reeds would take a machete. The clothing bought in hope of an adventure was drenched and stinking and the wonderful shoes full of mud and probably leeches, even now sucking on the bottoms of her feet.

In front of her, the water turned gray, developed slick spots and heaved. Two bulging eyes stared at Annie. A pink mouth as large as a trash can opened up and the beast bellowed, its fat teeth as big as her palm.

When it sank back down, a wave lashed up and soaked Annie to the knees.

A hippopotamus. Not the sweet little blue pottery hippo sold in the museum shop. The real thing. The real hideous and dangerous thing.

Annie thrashed around, screaming for help.

Any help. Any people, from any time.

But only the hippo returned to stare at her.

LOCKWOOD STRATTON

The boy named Lockwood Stratton had never had a fainting spell, nor ever been dizzy, nor ever needed glasses.

Now he seemed to be struggling with all three.

His fingers shivered over the white tablecloth. He concentrated on figuring the tip and putting the bills down. What he had just seen—or not seen—was strange, but more strange was that he had come to the museum at all.

He had no interest in his family background. Any mention of ancestors and he fell asleep or left the room, moaning. And yet when he had read the article about the Egyptian exhibition (he, who never read anything, not even his assignments!), he thought: My ancestor was the photographer at that dig.

His mother would have been thrilled that her son was having a cultural moment.

His father would have been astonished that he even remembered from whom he was descended.

But he had not told them. He had come into the city alone. Nobody did that. What fun was it to be alone in New York?

Well, I'm not alone now, he said to himself.

He and this Annie Lockwood would go back upstairs and finish seeing the special exhibition. How amazing that she and he shared a name and a history.

"Well, let's head on back," he said cheerfully, although he was not cheerful. He was still shaken by the way she had—but it was impossible. He had not seen that, because it hadn't happened.

"We still have half the exhibition to look at," he told her.

Nobody answered.

In fact, when he forced himself to raise his eyes from the tablecloth and look around, nobody was there. Not Annie, not the couple arguing at the next table, not even a waiter. The restaurant was empty and quiet. He walked uneasily toward the exit. He saw Annie Lockwood nowhere. She was distinctive, with that falling black hair.

She's got to be right here, he told himself. Waiting for me in the hall.

But she wasn't.

He saw the sign for the ladies' room, so he sat on a bench with some other men and waited patiently. But she didn't come out.

Great. I've lost her. Maybe she lost me, too, and she's gone back to the exhibition looking for me.

So he trooped back up the Grand Staircase, but she was not there.

He was embarrassed by how upset he was. Had she fallen into his life, full of delight and stories and lovely dark hair he yearned to touch, and he was so boring she just got up and left?

Although what he had seen was not exactly getting up and leaving.

He circled the special exhibition, pausing at the photograph under which he and this Annie Lockwood had met. The photograph seemed different. As if somebody had been added, or subtracted.

Impossible, he said to himself, shaking off a return of the dizziness that had struck in the restaurant.

He heard Annie scream for help, and he swerved, eyes wide open, to see where it had come from, but the room was empty, except for a guard who stared at him with a strange heavy-lidded antique look.

She went downstairs to the regular Egyptian collection, he told himself. I'll find her at the Temple of Dendur, sitting by the reflecting pool.

RENIFER

Pankh poled the little skiff through the papyrus reeds while Renifer sang. Fat pads of lotus swirled by, while brick-red swallows dipped and swerved in their quest for bugs. The hoopoe, a bird Renifer loved beyond all others, followed them, jumping from one papyrus frond to the next. Once she saw the snout of a crocodile, and, distantly, she heard the shrieks of baboons.

Renifer had had the servants put together a picnic basket and she fed Pankh dates and they drank sweet fig juice from the same bowl. She offered him cold duck and he nibbled the meat right down to her fingers. They dipped bread in salted oil and shared a block of cheese.

Twice he kissed her, and the reed boat trembled as they fought for balance, both physical and emotional. He was so handsome. When she looked at Pankh, she could think of nothing but marriage and the joy it would bring. Father, however, had lost his joy in the coming event. He was quiet. He was, in fact, fearful.

What could it mean?

Marriage must not be entered into lightly. She must be sure of Pankh, and he of her. So Renifer said to him, "We must talk of important things."

He had to laugh at the idea that girls had important things in their lives. He poled into the swamp until the papyrus towered above them, six and eight and ten feet of strong triangular stalks, the wide flat heads darkening the sun.

"You are the most beautiful girl in Egypt," said Pankh. "I am all that is important to you. I will give you everything."

"But what I want, Pankh, is the truth. Tell me what is between you and Father."

"That is between men, Renifer. Men make choices in life. Your father has made his. He will live with them or he will die with them. It is not

your place to consider truth or lack of truth. It is your place to obey. Yesterday you obeyed your father; from now on, you will obey me.”

Renifer had stopped listening to him. She was watching the most amazing terrifying thing she had ever seen. A spirit was materializing before her. First there was mist. Then shape. Then color and movement.

It was a *ka*.

Renifer had known all her life, and worshiped the fact, that the *ka* returned one day to the body. That was why it was necessary to save the corpse. Without a body, no *ka* could find its way home. But she and Pankh were deep within a jungle of papyrus. There could be no body buried here. The *ka* was lost.

Renifer could think of nothing more dreadful. She prayed that the *ka* would depart without touching them. Its shape was thickening now, and taking on human form, creating its own body, here in the papyrus! Renifer gazed in awe and terror.

Pankh, realizing he had lost his audience, turned to look where she looked.

“It’s a lost *ka*,” whispered Renifer, so frightened she could not think what god to call upon.

But the *ka* saw them and cried out.

“Hetepheres,” whispered Pankh. He fell to his knees and the reed boat, fortunately stable and hard to sink, shuddered under the weight of his collapse.

How could it be the *ka* of Hetepheres? wondered Renifer. Why would the name Hetepheres even enter Pankh’s mind? She has been dead for a year. Besides, the queen was buried so well and so richly. If ever a *ka* had a good place to return to, it is the queen’s tomb.

“Go home!” Pankh yelled at the *ka*. “Get away from us!”

But if it were a *ka*, it did not appear Egyptian. It came closer, and the tears it wept were real tears. It smelled bad, as foreigners did.

Renifer decided to treat it as she would a sacred animal—an ibis, or a cow dedicated to Hathor. The first thing was to feed it. She held out a date in the palm of her hand and in her other hand, a cup of fig juice, although it was doubtful that a creature so primitive would know how to drink from a cup, any more than a cow would.

But the creature seized the cup, drinking noisily, and then bit down hard on the date. It seemed astonished that the date contained a pit and spat the whole thing out. Renifer gave the creature bread instead, and it consumed the bread like a wild dog. Then it stood panting and whimpering.

Pankh had calmed down. "I don't think it's a *ka*," he said. "Maybe a slave girl in the dress of her native land? She has run away, perhaps, and is trying to hide in the papyrus swamp."

How frightening to be lost here! Papyrus was delicate with arching fronds, forming hieroglyphics of their own against the brown Nile and the blue sky. But millions of them ... mile upon mile of them ... and they interlaced like prison walls. Feet sank into mud and roots clung to ankles and crocodiles sprang out of dark water. No wonder the poor thing was frightened.

Its clothing was stranger than Renifer had seen even in the slave bazaar. Egyptians did not normally have slaves. Their servants were not sold in streets. Slaves were prisoners of war, and came from distant places that must be thrashed until they understood Egyptian superiority.

But Pankh was correct about the creature being female, and probably also that it was foreign, for its skin was as pale as bleached linen. It looked unhealthy to Renifer. Its hair was very long and must be very hot.

The creature tried to grab the pole with which Pankh pushed the little boat through the reeds but he jerked it out of her reach. "Pankh!" said Renifer severely. "We have to rescue her."

"No, we don't. It isn't a pet," said Pankh. "Don't touch it."

Renifer paid no attention to him. "It's all right," called Renifer, reaching toward the creature. "You may get in the boat with us. I'm going to take you home and bathe you. Don't be afraid. We won't leave you in the swamp."

Renifer held out her arms and the girl came, and Renifer felt its heartbeat, the heat of its skin and the wet of its tears.

Pankh kept the boat pole between himself and the pale creature. "Her skin is the color of a worm from under a rock," he said in distaste. "Perhaps that's the color of a returning spirit."

"Now, Pankh. You just said she was an escaping slave. She cannot be both." Renifer coaxed the girl to sit in the bottom of the boat. She picked out a sweet pastry and the creature ate it, but refused the beer, which

looked fine to Renifer, although maybe it needed to be strained again. Nile beer was rather thick. “The gods have sent her to us, Pankh. They even made you cry out the name of Hetepheres. She is not a *ka*, but perhaps sent by the queen’s *ka*! I cannot imagine the purpose. But soon the gods will reveal all. Our task will be made clear to us.”

“It is clear to me,” said Pankh, “that we should leave her here.”

Renifer patted the girl’s hand and said soothingly, “We’re going to go home now. You’re going to have a nice bath and put decent clothing on.”

“She’s the color of a rat’s tail,” said Pankh.

“She’s the color of ivory,” said Renifer. Even Pharaoh possessed little ivory, for it was so precious and rare. Father, of course, in his wealth, had acquired a number of pieces. Renifer lifted her voice to the gods and sang a song of thanksgiving for being honored with a girl of ivory.

Pankh swore at the same gods. He poled much more vigorously out of the papyrus than he had coming in.

The creature—or runaway slave—or foreigner—or *ka*—slid into the bottom of the boat and slept.

ANNIE

Humans!

Annie rushed forward. They were in a funny little boat with a swan's neck prow. But the people in the boat did not want her, and the man shoved her away with his oar.

"No, no," she said desperately. "There are crocodiles in there. Take me with you. Please? I'll do anything."

The man continued to push her away, but the girl behind him suddenly smiled at Annie, elbowed the man aside and drew Annie into the safety of the funny little boat. She was desperately relieved to have her feet out of the mud.

Her rescuer was younger than Annie. Very pretty, with rich warm golden-brown skin. Her black hair was extremely decorative, in many tiny tight braids, falling evenly to her shoulders, and heavily laced with beads. The man was bare except for a white kilt.

The boat was a sort of glorified raft. It was made, Annie realized, of hundreds of the very triangular reeds which had so terrified her. The woven reeds were dried out and stiff, and when she pressed her fingernail into them, they felt like Styrofoam, not wood.

"Papyrus," said the girl, smiling at Annie.

RENIFER

Once home in the women's quarters, Renifer could not get the girl to remove her dreadful clothing and Renifer could not figure out how to remove it herself. It was tied together in some bizarre foreign way.

The servants were laughing too hard and were also too afraid to be of any use.

Whatever tribe the girl came from, it was very primitive. Clearly, she had no acquaintance with gold or adornment. Her ears were pierced, so at some time in her life, she had worn something. But the only jewelry she possessed now was a plain leather wrist strap with a speckled circle.

Renifer decided on gold for a bribe.

Offering jewelry, one piece at a time, she coaxed the girl into a bracelet, and then a necklace and then another. Finally, Renifer got her to remove the strange clothing. The top piece gripped by means of little circles stuck through holes. It had sleeves, such as Renifer had seen on warriors from the Far East, when they had been captured by superior Egyptian forces.

What a relief to strip the girl naked and scrub away her foreign smell and dress her in clothing through which the cleansing desert air could pass.

When at last she was clean and well oiled—a process she resisted rather vigorously—Renifer chose one of her finest gowns. They had a clash over how the dress hung, as the girl wanted it to cover her upper body. Renifer tried to demonstrate that breasts were a girl's best asset and the girl of ivory had a fine pair, and must display them. In fact, Renifer had makeup for them, but when she tried to apply it, the girl flung herself across the room and even handed back the gold.

Renifer could only laugh and put the girl in a dress that hung from the shoulders.

Renifer decked the girl in her very finest jewels, the ones Father had acquired during the last year, which she wore only at private dinners,

because Father said they mustn't let neighbors realize how successful he had become. The necklace had a swollen solid gold collar from which hung gold lace and intense blue lapis lazuli. The finger rings were shaped like coiled serpents and sacred beetles. The earrings were paper-thin plates of hammered gold, six inches across.

When she was finally dressed, she no longer looked like a fish rotting on the shore. She was almost attractive. Once her face was properly made up, she might even be rather lovely. Renifer had never seen anything quite like her.

"A goddess sent you," said Renifer softly. "I'm sure of it. Tomorrow morning, or perhaps by the setting sun, the goddess will tell me your purpose."

Renifer's nurse sniffed. "She looks like a sacrifice. She is white like the best oxen and you have dressed her in white, like the best priestess. I think she is here to die."

They stared at her, while the pale girl herself stared at her new jewelry.

Renifer shivered, wondering to whom and for what the creature would be sacrificed.

ANNIE

All her life, Annie had loved those paintings of Egyptian women, their sloe eyes, dark lids and romantic mysterious glances. Renifer painted her just like that, the makeup going from the corners of her eyes all the way back into her hair. Annie sat and enjoyed it. She wasn't even trying to talk. The sounds Renifer made—if in fact her name was Renifer; it could just as easily be Zrnykr or Bjzhirhoo—did not sound like language.

Annie felt oddly as if she had not changed millennia; these were just girls gathered in a girl's bedroom, playing dress-up, putting on new makeup and sharing hairstyles.

Whereupon Renifer took off her hair.

Annie nearly screamed. Renifer was bald. She shaved her head!

Renifer laughed and pointed through a shuttered window at the huge yellow disk of the sun.

They shave their heads to keep cool, thought Annie, and wear wigs to keep off the sun, the way I'd wear a baseball cap. "Don't even think about shaving off my hair," said Annie. "Bad enough you put me in a see-through dress with nothing on underneath it."

Renifer and her maids burst into giggles at the duck-quacking sound of Annie's language. Then she tied Annie's hair into a knot on top of her head to get rid of it, while a servant brought out a magnificent wig.

It was a deeper black than Annie's real hair, with hundreds of the tight twisted braids like the ones in Renifer's wig. Into the wig, Renifer and the serving girl worked a series of gold ornaments, and then Annie was permitted to stand.

She knew by the delight on their faces that she was beautiful; that they were pleased.

Finally, Renifer decked Annie in gold necklaces. In Annie's world, a gold necklace was a slender thread, a mere suggestion of gold. Ancient

Egyptians were not so restrained. The necklace Renifer fastened around Annie's throat was splendid. Its weight astonished her.

The wig and the eyepaint had the nice result of making her feel invisible, the way you felt behind sunglasses. You could see other people, but they couldn't see you. And this was a good thing, because Renifer took Annie's hand and led her into a garden and displayed her in the sheer dress.

The garden was enchanting. The dark plumes of palm trees bowed in the evening breeze. Against a tawny mud-brick wall stood an ancient sycamore, bark peeling into leopard spots. Acacia were powdered with yellow blooms. There were oleander, and limes, and roses blooming as if for a score of weddings.

Every tree and shrub stood inside its own little puddle of Nile water. Gardeners were walking about refilling the puddles. Outside each puddle, the dirt was as hard and dry as wooden planks.

Geese and ducks wandered. A cat sunned itself on a wall. Annie's gown was pleasantly cool against her skin. Renifer led her up a ladder to a roof garden. From here, Annie could see children playing tag, leaping from rooftop to rooftop. Men in the street below were coming home from work—fishermen with their catch; vendors with their wagons. They wore cotton nightgowns, like baggy T-shirts to the ankle.

On the desert horizon, Annie saw two pyramids. She caught her breath. Every picture she had ever seen showed three. It didn't precisely tell her the year, but it did tell her the time: She had arrived in Egypt before the third pyramid had been built. What had she just read on the plaques in the museum? Had not Khufu built his Pyramid around 2500 B.C.?

She tried to think how Strat fit into this and realized that she was going to find Strat, here in antiquity. How he must be rejoicing at his good fortune! What archaeologist has not dreamed of falling through Time to the very place he digs?

Annie turned away from the sights of Memphis to find Renifer's friend Pankh—the one-syllable name was easy to learn—staring at her with loathing. He stepped back when she approached, rubbing his arms, as if she literally made his skin crawl. Annie stuck close to Renifer. Pankh wore

a pleated white cloth tied diaper-fashion between his legs. To Annie, he appeared comical, but Renifer certainly admired him.

A man who seemed to be Renifer's father greeted them, raising his eyebrows at the sight of Annie, but shrugging. When Pankh's back was turned, the father sent him looks. Just so had Annie and Tod looked at the woman with whom their father had had that affair. If looks were sharp knives, the woman would have died a quick death.

So, thought Annie, Renifer's father hates Renifer's boyfriend.

There was no time to dwell on this interesting problem, because a little sister and several brothers came pounding up the steps to the roof patio, and surrounded Annie, patting her as they did their pet goose and their pet monkey. The children were naked and dusty and beautiful and she found herself laughing and romping with them.

For dinner, there were roast pigeons with onion. There was baked perch with pomegranate sauce. The bread was delicious and also sandy, as if they had made the bread outside on a windy day. There were cakes drizzled with honey and many kinds of cheese.

Annie began nodding off, a giggly little brother on each side of her keeping her upright. Renifer led her away. She was so tired she could hardly make it down the roof ladder.

Renifer's bedroom was so full of beautiful objects. Every possession looked worthy of a king's tomb, but it was the bed Annie wanted to try out. It was wood framed and tilted toward the feet, with a footboard to keep Renifer from sliding off and one of those wonderful wooden pillows, like a torture rack.

But Annie did not get a bed or even a wooden pillow. Mats kept under Renifer's bed were unrolled and all Annie had for comfort was an inch of reed on a mud-brick floor.

She meant to stay awake for hours, memorizing all she had seen so she could tell Strat, but she fell asleep the moment her cheek touched the mat.

She did not know that when the servants unrolled their mats, tiptoeing around her, they carefully placed amulets on all four sides of her, to protect themselves.

CAMILLA

The following morning, the shaft which young Stratton had discovered was speedily emptied, but spirits sank as soon as the first person descended. The space below was small and unadorned. There were no gilt ceilings. No fine statues. No fabulous treasure. There were the remains of furniture, the wood having disintegrated, only the gold leaf which had wrapped each leg or arm still there. The only other object in the tomb was a huge unopened stone sarcophagus, sealed in antiquity.

“That means,” the Yale man told Camilla, “that the tomb was robbed of anything easily carried, while the big pieces were abandoned.”

“But surely, if the sarcophagus is sealed,” Camilla protested, “there will be a coffin inside. A king’s mummy and lots of gold.”

“Nothing is for sure in ancient Egypt,” said Dr. Lightner ruefully. He was lowered by rope down the sharply slanted shaft. Strat followed, carrying his camera equipment.

Camilla stared down the opening through which Hiram Stratton’s son had just disappeared. If only he would rot down there. If only some tomb curse would close in upon him, smothering him with rocks. Then Hiram Stratton would find out what it was like to lose somebody he loved!

She sipped warm water from her canteen, wishing there were a way to keep drinks cold. To make ice, perhaps. She tried to imagine a method of creating ice in hot weather but gave up.

Dr. Lightner emerged from the shaft. He was excited and happy. “Look at this!” he cried.

He sounded like one of her little sisters or brothers bringing home some treasure found on the sidewalk. A bright penny or a lost pencil. Camilla was touched.

He held in his hand something that had been buried thousands of years ago. For the first time, it was struck by sun.

It was a sandal of gold.

Camilla had rarely seen gold. The gleam astonished her. No wonder the world had fallen in love with this metal; no wonder that conquistadors and pirates, presidents and archaeologists wanted it. She wanted that sandal. She was amazed by the ferocity of her desire. She asked permission, and received it, to touch the shoe. But when she did, a strange damp terror crept into her and she pulled her hand back as if from a hot iron.

"It was lying on the floor," said Dr. Lightner. "Just one sandal. Not the other. It's solid gold. Not intended for actual wear."

"Yet it was worn," said Camilla. "See? The sole of the sandal is scraped."

They stared in astonishment. She was right. The sandal had once slid onto the bare foot of an Egyptian girl, its intricately designed gold rope between her toes.

It was an Egyptian Cinderella's slipper, thought Camilla. She was leaving the ball, and her magic slipper fell off and was left behind. Somewhere in time, she still wears her other slipper.

Dr. Lightner held the gold sandal against his cheek, to feel its history. "Would the slipper fit you, Miss Matthews?" he asked.

"It was made for a small and slender foot," she told him. "My foot is far too large. You will have to find a princess."

"Miss Matthews, say no such thing. Among women, you are a queen."

Camilla blushed and then, being truthful, extended her right foot. Grinning, he stuck his out next to it. Dr. Lightner's feet made her own look delicate. They stood in each other's footprints, lost their balance, and gripped each other to keep from falling. Before it could become impropriety, of course, they stepped back and pretended to be doing other things.

"Might I descend the shaft?" said Camilla eagerly, merely being polite, not expecting to need permission.

But Dr. Lightner refused. She was a lady, he explained.

On the one hand, Camilla loved being a lady: too important to take risks or get dirty. On the other hand, she hated being a lady: too *unimportant* to participate in the fun.

The mystery of the tomb, however, was not so much the single sandal, but its owner. When torches were brought into the depths, and the

hieroglyphs on the stone coffin read, it turned out to be the sarcophagus of Hetepheres, mother of Khufu, who built the Great Pyramid.

Impossible. This little hole—a queen’s tomb?

Pharaoh forced his people to labor for decades to create *his* tomb—and stuck his mother into an undecorated closet?

“Surely, inside that sarcophagus lies the queen herself,” said the young man from Yale.

“How fabulous her mummy will be!” said the boy from Princeton.

Dr. Lightner spread his hands in a shrug. “One does not know these things in advance. Egypt likes to hold her secrets.”

“We must have a ceremony for the opening of her sarcophagus,” said the youth from Harvard, having been raised to expect things to go his way, “and invite all the important archaeologists in Egypt. Within easy reach are scholars and dignitaries from Germany and Austria, France and Italy, America and England.”

The site was chaotic as dusk fell. Egyptian workmen scurried and carried. Men from other digs in Giza came to discuss the find and the possibility of treasure. Camels spat and donkeys bellowed. The shadow of the Pyramid sketched a black line over the sand.

Camilla kept track of every member of the expedition.

The moment finally came in which nobody was looking in her direction. Camilla felt the nuns who had taught her calling *Stop it!* She ignored them.

She wrapped the gold sandal in her scarf and drifted away.

All the action was around Hetepheres’ tomb. She walked swiftly to the long low tent where young Stratton and the college boys slept.

She was now a thief. She could never deny that in this life, and in the next life, she must face her Maker, and when asked which commandments she had broken, she would have to admit that she had stolen.

But Hiram Stratton, Sr., had stolen a life.

There were five cots in the tent, each with some gear stacked by. Which was Strat’s? By the bed closest to the door, on a small scarred wooden trunk, lay one of Dr. Lightner’s volumes with a folded letter half-tucked into it. Camilla withdrew the letter.

Dear Katie,

Your letters continue to make me feel worthless and self-indulgent. I participate in the opening of tombs—and you serve the most wretched humans on earth. That sickness terrifies me, Katie. One day, I fear, you will be what they are. And yet you chose that life. I will never understand. But I will always be proud.

I sold my best photograph of the Sphinx to a London newspaper! I had to keep a bit of money to resole my boots; sand is hard on footgear. But here is the rest. Katie, buy vegetables and milk, so you resist illness. Go ahead, laugh. You know I despise vegetables and milk. But I worry. You might spend this on chocolate for your patients, instead of upon yourself.

Today we descend into the tomb I found! Pray I will take a photograph good enough to sell. Then I will have lots of money to send you.

*Your very dear friend,
Strat*

Camilla stood for a moment. Then she opened the trunk.

Strat had few possessions. A spyglass, that he might see across the desert. Notebooks and pens. A few changes of clothing and linen. A Bible, with a red ribbon marking his place.

She lifted the Bible, intending to see what book and chapter he was reading, but out fell the tiny envelope. It was not sealed, but the flap gently tucked in. Camilla opened it, too. The lock of hair Strat had told her about was black and shimmery as silk. It was very straight and did not want to be in such a small space, but leaped toward the opening, straightening itself as if it still lived and grew.

Annie, thought Camilla, and the dank terror that had come through the gold sandal spread through her limbs once more.

She freed herself from the spell of the hair, put the gold sandal inside one of Strat's shirts and stumbled away.

• • •

“The wind has brought tears to your eyes,” said Dr. Lightner, handing Camilla his handkerchief.

She blotted her tears.

From Spain Camilla had sent a cable to Duffie, telling him that Strat was with Dr. Lightner’s dig in Giza. Shortly she would send another cable. It would contain the news of the son’s ruin. A man who stole gold from an archaeology site was destined for the hellhole of an Egyptian prison.

Hiram Stratton would have no joyful reunion. Perhaps no reunion at all. Men do not live long in such prisons, what with cholera and typhus and murder.

“See how the desert has changed, sir,” she whispered. “In the dark, it stretches on like death.”

“That is the very horror Pharaoh tried to fend off,” agreed Dr. Lightner. “All these stones he piled into a mountain, a ladder to his eternal life, because he so feared death. That I can understand. But what possible explanation can there be for the tomb Strat found? Why did Khufu not equally prepare his mother for *her* eternal life?”

She gave back the handkerchief. Her deeds had shadowed her soul, and she was worthy of nothing, not even a square of linen.

“Miss Matthews,” said Dr. Lightner, “might I ask a most special favor of you?”

“Of course, sir,” she said drearily.

“The French embassy is giving a dinner party. It seems that a major American art collector is arriving in Cairo. Over the years he has purchased many a French oil painting. We are privileged to meet him and of course invite him to our excavation.”

Camilla kept forgetting she was here as a reporter. Dr. Lightner would want this event in the newspapers back in America and so would the art collector. She had never read a society column in her life. She had no idea what to write about such an event.

“Miss Matthews,” said Dr. Lightner, “would you do me the honor of allowing me to escort you to this dinner?”

She was not to attend as a female reporter with work to do. She had been asked as a guest. A man—a *tall* man—had sought out her company. “You are so kind, sir,” she said, her words stumbling on her tongue. “I regret,

however, that when I packed my trunks, I did not plan for a ball at the French embassy.”

He beamed. “I have already communicated with a friend whose wife has a plentiful wardrobe and will be delighted to assist you.”

Men, Camilla thought. Whoever she is, her clothing won’t fit me. It’s too late to call a dressmaker. I have literally nothing to wear on such an evening.

But she was too touched by his eagerness to tell him how silly he was; that she, Camilla Mateusz, made even dressmakers laugh. And then she remembered that Camilla Mateusz did not exist. “Dr. Lightner, it will be my privilege.”

And privilege it was.

Two dressmakers used up two gowns to create one for Camilla. With anyone else, Camilla would have been weeping. Lady Clementine made it a party.

The maids cleverly stitched an entire ten inches to the length of one gown by using the ruffles off the other. “I feel like Cinderella,” said Camilla, laughing.

“Indeed,” said Lady Clementine, smiling. “And here are your borrowed slippers. Silver-toed. Are they not fashionable? Luckily, my feet are large for me and your feet are small for you.”

Slippers ...

Was the gold slipper even now being discovered in Strat’s trunk? Would Dr. Lightner arrive at Lady Clementine’s shocked and heartsick, having learned that his cameraman was a thief? Was Strat even now in some dark prison, without light or air or hope?

What price revenge? thought Camilla. My soul. Strat’s future. But I do not care about either one. I want Hiram Stratton to suffer, and he will.

“Now stand tall, my dear,” said Lady Clementine. “Do not slump. Dr. Lightner is halfway in love with you, and it is your splendid height that attracts him.”

“Halfway in love? With me?”

“Of course. You are as tall and strong as a pillar of Karnak, I believe he said. He is quite smitten. Of course archaeologists are a difficult group,

my dear. Think twice. They are apt to be demanding, pernickety and dusty.”

Camilla laughed.

“Capitalize upon your height. Throw your shoulders back. Be tall.”

Nobody had ever instructed Camilla to do that.

Lady Clementine became very serious. “I see you are well educated and more than capable of presenting fine arguments during table discussions. Remember that ladies in search of a husband do not demonstrate brains.” Lady Clementine fixed around Camilla’s throat a beautiful necklace of shimmering pearls.

In the looking glass, Camilla found, as many a girl before her, that the wearing of beautiful clothing and jewels made her lovelier and more worthy.

“Perfect!” cried Lady Clementine. “Just so must you blush and lower your eyes. It draws men’s eyes toward your bosom, you know, and away from your mind. You must not display your mind.”

“Thank you,” said Camilla gratefully, and they pantomimed hugs, such as decoratively dressed and coiffed women give one another.

ANNIE

Since dawn, Annie had been pointing toward the Great Pyramid. By the time Pankh arrived in mid-morning, Annie's gestures had crossed the language barrier. Renifer coaxed Pankh to take them to see the Pyramid.

Pankh was unwilling.

It took considerable pouting and pleading to change his mind. Renifer was excellent at both. Flouncing around in her dress, a very thin gauze pressed in stiff pleats, Renifer made it clear that neither gold nor gifts would make her happy. Only an excursion to the Pyramid.

Finally Pankh shrugged and nodded.

Annie held Renifer's hand as they threaded through narrow streets shaded by canvas canopies, lined with stalls selling spices and cookpots and shoes. They passed walled houses and tenements, donkeys tied in stable yards, geese in the road and even a royal procession.

Everybody knelt to gaze lovingly at a young woman on a litter covered in beaten gold. A princess, perhaps, reclining on pillows under her fringed shade? Four bulky men in tiny white kilts carried the litter on their shoulders. They walked rhythmically, one counting, like rowers on a crew team.

At the waterfront, Pankh commandeered a boat. Two men rowed half-standing, toes braced against a shelf. They moved quickly on the river, a breeze bucketing inside a much-mended sail. Annie was mesmerized by the water traffic: little boats, tubby boats, oared boats and sailboats, barges loaded with stone or casks, logs or bales.

Along the banks of the Nile, hundreds of men labored, making bricks out of mud. Villages were perched on the heights, their little mud-brick dwellings like piles of little brown wren houses.

From the Nile, they entered a canal, straight-sided as a ruler, slicing through fields and orchards, palm trees and grazing sheep. They steered

into a square lake, neatly sided by cut stone, and pulled up to a wharf. Soldiers paced up and down. Small sphinxes were being set in rows.

Pankh swept his two women before him and up to a vast temple.

So modern and harsh was its design Annie felt it could have been an electric power plant in Chicago or Detroit. They did not enter the temple, but walked through a vast portico and emerged on a paved pedestrian street with awnings stretched over pillars. Flowers had been laid on the whole length of the road, bouquet after bouquet, and their feet crunched on the sun-dried petals.

At the end of the shining road was Khufu's Pyramid.

In the museum photograph, the Pyramid had been tiers of great lumps, two million brown sugar cubes, each the size of a dining room table. But at its creation, the Pyramid was slick with polished white limestone. It was surrounded by a sea of baby pyramids, flat-topped pyramids, temples, graveyards, mausoleums, steles—and one vast Sphinx, being chipped out of bedrock as Annie watched.

She began laughing with excitement. Strat must be here! This was the very place where he had taken his photographs. She must keep her eyes open.

She examined every passing man, giggling at the thought of Victorian Strat wearing a white gauze kilt like Pankh.

RENIFER

Renifer thanked the gods for letting her live now; a time which would last for all time, embodied in this very Pyramid.

The girl of ivory was gasping in awe. Wherever she was from, she had never seen anything like this. But then, nobody had.

I was right to insist that Pankh bring us today, thought Renifer. The girl herself made it clear that this is where she must be. The reason she was put in my hands will be presented to me now.

They passed a priest in a robe of panther skins. As he approached, the priest lifted a large ostrich feather fan and hid his face behind it. Renifer was mildly surprised, because priests of the City of the Dead were the proudest men in Egypt. They did not hide their status. When she looked after him, to see which temple he entered, the priest was half-running.

They approached the burial place of Queen Hetepheres. Her chapel was a delicate structure, sitting at the foot of the thirteen-acre Pyramid like a child's toy. Over the portico, the blue and white stripes of the awning fluttered in the wind and the reflection from the silver floor was blinding.

On two blessed occasions, Renifer had been privileged to help Princess Meresankh honor her grandmother. Renifer had done the actual carrying of food to the dead queen. A royal ornament, Meresankh had never once used her hands. Handmaidens were so called because their hands did all work.

Now Renifer knelt to honor Pharaoh's mother, motioning the girl of ivory to join her. Putting their weight on one knee, they leaned forward, extending the other leg back so as to achieve a position both graceful and helpless.

Here in the shade of the awnings, the silver had not gotten too hot to touch. Reverently, Renifer kissed the floor. Here had she prayed and knelt with the queen's granddaughter. Here had she scattered droplets of sacred water and the petals of flowers.

And puddling out of the doorway onto the silver floor was something wet and red, but not sacred.

Profane.

Blood.

IV



Time for Sacrifice

RENIFER

The girl of ivory scrambled to her feet. Yanking Renifer up from her position of humility, she dragged her behind a screen of immense potted ferns just as two tomb police staggered out of the chapel. Both were bleeding heavily.

One was holding together a dreadful wound in his side, so deep it could never be sewn together; a gash from which he would die. “Pen-Meru!” he cried in a gurgling voice, and fell onto the silver pavement.

Pen-Meru? thought Renifer dizzily. But her father was not involved with the tomb police. He was a controller of the Nile, a measurer of floods and opener of canals.

The second soldier sank to his knees. Renifer thought he might live. She would tear up her dress and use it for bandages. She—

But the second soldier also whispered, “Pen-Meru.”

There must be some other Pen-Meru of whom Renifer had not heard.

Pankh sprinted forward from where he had been waiting in the shade of another temple while Renifer prayed. He pulled his dagger from its sheath.

Renifer’s heart soared with pride. Pankh would be clothed in glory! For of course the tomb robbers who had done this terrible deed were inside the chapel. Brave Pankh was going to finish them off.

But Pankh did not enter the chapel. Lifting high the thin shining blade, he stabbed to death the still living tomb policeman who had sunk to his knees.

Renifer clutched the slender lotus pillar of the portico. What could this mean? How could Pankh do that? The man had been helpless! Already wounded for Pharaoh’s sake.

Now Pankh was a blur, springing into the chapel itself. From within came a cry of terror. “No, Pankh! I promise—”

There was a groan and a thud.

There was silence.

The hot sickening smell of blood filled the air.

Renifer had to understand what was happening. She slipped inside the queen's chapel, careful not to block the sun, whose glint off the silver floor provided the only illumination to the interior. It took a moment to focus in the gloom. The walls were painted with scenes from the queen's life. From painted arbors hung thick purple grapes and heavy green leaves. On a ceiling of deep blue, gold stars were scattered.

Pankh stood panting in the center of the chapel. His knife stuck out of the chest of a third tomb policeman, now prostrate on the floor. In the shadows, pressed against the sacred illustrations, stood her father, Pen-Meru.

There were no other men inside the little chapel.

There was no other exit from which the killers might have fled.

No, thought Renifer. My father did not do this. Pankh did not do this. I am a slow thinker. In a moment I will understand.

She pasted herself against the wall, as if she too had been painted there.

"Good job, Pankh," said Renifer's father, grinning.

The two men slapped hands in victory and laughed. Then they frowned down upon the corpse at their feet.

"Now what?" said Pankh.

Renifer stepped forward, startling her father and her beloved, who whirled to see who was there. Father gripped a bloody dagger and Pankh tightened his fist around his own knife.

They had forgotten she existed at all, let alone that she was witness to this carnage. For one terrible moment, she thought herself in danger from the two men she loved most.

She saw now a rectangular opening in the chapel floor. Three paving stones had been lifted aside to reveal a great black shaft: the entrance to Hetepheres' tomb. It should be entirely filled with rubble—thirty feet down, all sand and rock. If the shaft was empty, then the queen's tomb had been emptied by robbers. No doubt the space below contained little of value now. The three dead policemen had walked in on the robbery.

And now her thoughts spun all too fast. Renifer felt as if she were drowning in the Nile. Mud-brown water silted up her heart. "You are tomb robbers," whispered Renifer. "It was *you* they caught."

Her father shrugged. "I have always been a tomb robber, my daughter. And your uncle with me. And Pankh."

"No! It cannot be! Father, I cannot believe it of you!"

Her father snorted. "You know perfectly well we live beyond the means of any controller of the Nile. *You* are the one yearning for gold. You and your mother insist on necklaces here and bracelets there. *You* are the ones for whom five servants are not enough; no, you must have fifteen," he snapped.

She thought of the chests of gold at home, all those jewels fit for a queen. The Sekhmet fit for a Pharaoh. Indeed. To a Pharaoh and a queen had they once belonged.

"I regret you are here, my love," said Pankh, "but since you are, you will participate."

In murder? thought Renifer. Never. She stared in loathing at their blood-flecked chests and arms.

"So far we are safe," said Pankh. "Easy lies will get us out of this. We say we are the ones who caught robbers in the act. Regrettably, they escaped, having first murdered three brave and true protectors of the queen's chapel."

Pankh and Pen-Meru laughed.

They had slain three loyal men of Pharaoh's and found it funny? Renifer felt as if she had been thrown into a sewage ditch. She could never be cleansed of the evil her father had done.

"I think, Pankh, we should say that you and I captured the actual robbers," said Pen-Meru. "They are being tortured even now, and dispatched to the Land in the West."

"What if He asks to see the prisoners?" said Pankh.

Pen-Meru shrugged. "We stake out a few peasants."

Renifer was appalled. "You would execute innocent men, pretending they robbed this tomb? But this is Egypt! Such things do not happen here."

"Would you rather that I and your future husband got staked out in the desert?" said Pen-Meru.

Renifer remembered how Pankh had stroked the goddess Sekhmet. It had not been worship, or lack of worship. It had been blackmail. *Your daughter marries me, Pen-Meru, or I bring Pharaoh into your gates to see what you have stolen from Him.*

I am the daughter of a tomb robber, thought Renifer. I will be made to marry a tomb robber. My father and husband will force my sons to be tomb robbers.

Renifer caught the distant scent of incense being burned. Somewhere a priest was obeying the sacred rites. Much good it did him, when people like her father were abroad in the land.

Here had Princess Meresankh prayed as Renifer sang, "Sky and stars make music for you. Sun and moon praise you. Gods exalt you and goddesses lift their voices." But Meresankh's grandmother was not exalted now. Renifer's family had brought her down.

Her father said to Pankh, "Even if Pharaoh believes our story, I think we will be executed. Pharaoh will find out that not only is His mother's tomb nearly empty, but her mummy is gone. He'll execute everyone in sight. He might execute the whole battalion of tomb police, even those not on duty this month."

"*You stole the queen's mummy?*" cried Renifer. Her family would be haunted forever. The powerful *ka* of the queen would waylay them by night and set traps for them by day. Renifer's children would be doomed to lives of terror.

Horror curdled in her stomach like goat's milk in the sun. She was not going to have children. She too would be staked out in the desert, three days dying, jackals waiting. Renifer's eternity would be spent in limbo, with neither rest nor joy. She hardly minded (although probably she would mind when they actually drove the stake through her). Such a fate was richly deserved by a family that profaned the tomb of a queen.

"We took the inner coffin, Renifer," said her father irritably, "because it contained the finest jewels. Of course it had her mummy in it."

"Where did you put the mummy?" said Renifer, trying not to sob. "We'll put it back. She must lie among her remaining tomb goods."

"I tossed the mummy in the desert after I peeled away the gold and silver," said Pen-Meru.

The verb he used—*toss*—was horrible in its simplicity. Children tossed balls. Her father had tossed aside the mummy of a queen as if it had no more meaning than a child's toy.

"Did you always know about this?" Renifer said in Pankh's direction. She could not face him.

“I’ve been helping since I was twelve.” His voice was proud and even sassy, as if he had always wanted to swagger in front of her with this information, and now at last, his real self could stand before her: tomb robber.

Renifer was weeping. “Does Mother know?” she asked her father.

“She pretends not to. Like you.”

“But I didn’t know,” she cried.

They lost interest in her silly vapors and returned to the problem at hand.

“More soldiers will be here soon,” said Pen-Meru gloomily. “That means Pharaoh will be told soon. They’ll go down the shaft and report to Pharaoh that not only was His mother’s tomb robbed, her bones are gone. We are dead men.”

“I’ve got it,” said Pankh excitedly. “We tell Him that we, in our glory, prevented the robbery. The valor of Pen-Meru and his future son-in-law, Pankh, led to the deaths of some robbers—but the others fled. We tell Pharaoh that since the escaped evildoers now know where the opening of the queen’s tomb is, we recommend an immediate solution to Pharaoh.”

Pankh was almost jumping up and down in his delight. Renifer wondered how she had ever found this man attractive.

“You will recall, Pen-Meru,” said her beloved, “that adjacent to that temple being constructed close to the Pyramid is an unused tomb. It was built for Princess Nitqret of Blessed Memory, but she chose to be buried in her husband’s tomb. How we will praise the vacant tomb! We will convince Pharaoh that it is fit for the *ka* of His mother. Even now, we will explain to Him, we are swiftly removing the tomb furniture from this defiled spot and have taken the blessed body of Hetepheres to its new and safe resting place.” He folded his arms over his chest, swollen with pride at his brilliant idea.

“It’s not much of a tomb,” said Pen-Meru doubtfully. “It’s hardly a closet. They sank it very deep, but since Nitqret was buried elsewhere, they never began the wall paintings or finished up—”

“Who cares?” said Pankh impatiently. “Pharaoh is never going to descend the shaft to see. He will believe you. You in your radiance will have acted swiftly and with reverence to rescue a queen whose safe harbor has been invaded. I will treat you as a god before Him, marveling in the

splendor of your quick thinking and willingness to die for the queen. He'll fall for it."

"Maybe," said Renifer's father. "But maybe not. Pharaoh isn't stupid."

"May I remind you what will happen if we allow Pharaoh's servants to climb down that shaft?"

And then the time for planning was over. The chapel filled with more tomb police. Shocked and saddened by the loss of their colleagues, they let Pen-Meru take charge. He motioned them into a huddle, giving instructions.

"We work quickly to transfer the remaining tomb furniture," said Pen-Meru. "Pharaoh will kill every one of us for failing to keep His mother's tomb safe. But if He thinks that in the end, we *did* keep her safe ... Well, then. Not only do we survive, He will pay us each a great reward."

The tomb police, afraid of the wrath of Pharaoh, agreed.

Renifer felt there was a flaw in the plan. Everybody knew where tomb entrances were. The moment a chapel was raised, the world understood that the tomb lay beneath.

Does Pharaoh think nobody knows where He will lie? wondered Renifer. Having built the largest pyramid in the world above His shaft? Not that anybody could ever shift those stones. Still ...

For the first time she realized that *Pharaoh would not bury Himself beneath His Pyramid*. He would have a real grave site, hidden and safe. The Pyramid was many things, and one was trickery.

Every tomb policeman went to work immediately. They delegated and planned, summoning laborers and torches, planks and ropes, carts and baskets.

Although Hetepheres' sarcophagus weighed many tons, removing it was not difficult, as the equipment was close at hand and used every day. Once lifted up, it was placed on rollers, hitched to ropes that were hitched to men, and moved to the mouth of the new tomb. Nitigret's shaft was far deeper. Affixing the strongest of papyrus ropes, the men lowered the sarcophagus easily, their only worry that the ropes would split under the weight and the coffin drop to the bottom and break into a thousand pieces. But that did not happen.

The remaining pieces of tomb furniture—only a bed canopy and a carrying chair had not been stolen—were taken down and piled against the

wall. The gold hieroglyphs of the queen's name glittered against the black ebony of her bed.

"Now," said Pen-Meru, "we go to Pharaoh."

Renifer did not want to imagine the scene with Pharaoh, as her father and her future husband outdid themselves with lies to the Living God. If Pharaoh believed the untruths Pen-Meru put before Him, would it prove that He was man and not God? And if He were man, and not God, what then was Egypt? What were the sun and the Nile? Who controlled them and made them great?

Renifer felt bludgeoned by the heat and sun, the shock and shame.

"The more distinguished the ceremony of reburying Hetepheres," said Pankh, "the less Pharaoh will question the details. Girls are useful in ceremonies. They add a feeling of reverence and grace. You, Renifer, will sing. He loves your voice. And the girl of ivory we will dress as a handmaiden. She is just the kind of gift to please Pharaoh."

Renifer had forgotten the girl of ivory.

Was she indeed a *ka*? Could she be Queen Hetepheres' *ka*? Once Father had thrown Hetepheres' body to the jackals, had the *ka* lost its way in the papyrus swamp? Or could the girl of ivory be a messenger sent by Hetepheres?

Why had Pankh cried out the name of the queen when he first saw the girl of ivory? Because he knew what he had done to Hetepheres? Or because her *ka* put those syllables in his mouth?

Renifer found the girl still in the shade of the silver portico among the fronds of the green ferns. She seemed neither afraid nor confused, but lightly embraced Renifer, as if to say that she understood.

The great sun was sinking now in bloodred splendor. Pharaoh's barge was visible in the square lagoon far down the causeway.

"The timing is good," said Pankh. "Tomorrow Pharaoh has planned a great feast to welcome the return of the admiral from Lebanon. Not only did the admiral successfully acquire twelve ships of cedar logs, he brought dancing bears and trained dwarfs. Pharaoh will want to complete the reburial tonight, so that tomorrow He can concentrate on the celebrations."

Renifer was beginning to believe the outrageous plan might succeed.

Her father said, "You, Renifer, will utter the sacraments when we seal His mother in darkness. You will describe how the girl of ivory arrived;

how she was sent by a *ka*. Pharaoh loves omens from the next world. Don't say she's just a foreigner who needed a bath. Then, deep in the night, we bring Him to the top of the new shaft. We let Pharaoh catch a glimpse of gold at the bottom, shining in the moonlight. He will assume that everything originally with the queen is still with the queen! And because we left behind her stone sarcophagus—after all, it has no resale value—He will think her silver and gold coffin is within.”

“What do you bet,” said Pankh, “that in His gratitude, He even invites us to the feast for the admiral?”

Pen-Meru laughed and bet the golden Sekhmet. Pankh bet six gold necklaces. They slapped hands to seal the bet.

Farmers were yanked from a field. They insisted they were not tomb robbers. But of course, that is what a robber would shout as he was carried to the desert edge. Once they understood their fate, they began screaming and fighting, but to no avail. The stakes were driven in slowly, to prolong the pain.

Renifer felt the stakes through her own heart; through all her hopes.

“What if the girl of ivory runs away or behaves badly?” asked Father.

“She loves gold,” said Pankh. “Adorn her in much gold and she will be happy.”

CAMILLA

O h! the compliments of the men as they gathered for dinner at the French embassy in Cairo. The smiles with which the men greeted Camilla, upon being introduced. The admiring eyes. The tender remarks. Dizzy with excitement, Camilla flirted and laughed.

“If only we were not going to war!” cried the British officers. “We would surely beg the pleasure of your company at our dances, Miss Matthews.”

How splendid the British were, chests crossed by sashes, hung with bejeweled military crosses, decked out in many-colored ribbons.

Dr. Lightner bowed to them, saying with great courtesy, “I hope you will join us for a dance I will give in her honor.”

“But of course!” cried the guests. “Such a beautiful woman deserves everything in her honor.”

“Ah,” said the French, sounding so intimate that Camilla blushed, “*quelle perfection.*”

Camilla could not stop smiling. Neither could Dr. Lightner. Camilla could have swirled around the room forever, height forgotten, as she and Dr. Lightner drifted from group to group.

“What a pleasure this is,” said Dr. Lightner, as they waltzed in graceful circles. “Normally I am the outcast. The tedious scholar who writes books. Tonight, I have grace and appeal, Miss Matthews, because of your company.”

Her very height prevented even Dr. Lightner from knowing how young she was; it was a disguise in inches. She was by far the youngest at the party, but she was holding her own. She wanted the introductions to go on forever, but of course, eventually the guest of honor arrived and they must all sit down for a formal dinner.

The guest of honor was very fat, strapped into his dinner jacket and cummerbund. His jowls layered down onto his chest and his arms were so thick he could hardly bend at the elbows.

“A very rich man indeed,” said a British officer, admiring the amount of meat and brandy it took to achieve such girth.

“Excellent mustache,” said another.

The guest had a strong American accent. The British flinched slightly at his vulgar words and the French raised their eyebrows. The Germans could not be bothered to cross the room. But Dr. Lightner was most eager to meet the gentleman. “An American art collector!” he whispered. “It’s very new. All the best people are doing it now. It gives one hope for America. We will bring him to the excavation.”

And then for the first time that evening, Dr. Lightner’s face drooped into tired lines. “He will expect glory,” said the archaeologist sadly, “and find only potsherds. He will expect gold. I did not want to sully this lovely evening, Miss Matthews, with the sad fact of what happened this afternoon. We cannot find the gold sandal.”

Camilla was so flushed with excitement that another layer of pink in her cheeks was not noticeable. “It must have been mislaid,” she said.

“Nobody mislays gold. They do, however, steal it.”

“No!” cried Camilla. “Surely not. Who at your dig would stoop so low?” She wondered when they would search the gentlemen’s tent. They might not, now that she thought of it. It would be too great an insult for young men so full of importance.

“Hush,” murmured Dr. Lightner. “Let us not speak of regrettable events during this fine occasion. Come, it is our turn to be presented to the guest of honor.”

Camilla was oddly afraid. This close, the body did not seem grand, but gross. The mustache not lush, but graying moss creeping over the lips and into the mouth. The swollen hand that gripped hers was girded in rings so tight that the flesh burst out around them. The man’s breath stank of pipe tobacco and he had already had too much brandy.

The party felt infected.

“And this lovely lady?” he said. A smile crawled out from behind the moss of his mustache.

Camilla tried to smile, but did not achieve it.

“This,” said Archibald Lightner proudly, “is my guest, sir. Miss Camilla Matthews.”

A flicker of amusement went through the man’s eyes, and Camilla felt owned, as a slave might be, or a factory hand.

“Ah, yes,” said the guest of honor. “The famous Miss Matthews. The reporter from Kansas.”

In all America, only Mr. Duffie knew there was a Camilla Matthews who claimed to be a reporter. Mr. Duffie and one other man. Camilla tried to step back, but the man did not release his grip, as a gentleman should. “Hiram Stratton, Sr., at your service, ma’am,” said he.

Camilla tried to extricate her hands from his paws but he did not allow it. She would have to scrub her fingers as she had scrubbed herself from the dread of leprosy.

I would rather have leprosy than touch Hiram Stratton, she thought. Why did I not realize that he would come? It is my own telegraph that brought him. Of course he would not trust me to bring his beloved son home. After all, I had no intention of doing it. I intended his son to live out his days, or at least a few years, in an Egyptian prison.

But I have failed.

Whether or not the gold sandal is found among Strat’s belongings, nothing will happen to the boy. Hiram Stratton’s power is tangible even in this room that belongs to another government. His power will work anywhere. In Egypt, being paid off has been a tradition for thousands of years. There will still be a joyful reunion, and father and son will go home to burn down yet another factory.

“Mr. Stratton, sir!” cried Dr. Lightner. “What a privilege to encounter a man of your stature. It is my hope to be permitted to bring you to Giza, that I may myself escort you among the ancient Egyptian monuments, and have the great pleasure of showing you the excavation under my supervision. Just this week, we uncovered a hitherto unknown tomb. It is full of mystery.”

“Fine, fine,” said Hiram Stratton, already bored.

“In fact, my good sir,” said Dr. Lightner, now somewhat uneasy, “among the young men spending a year with me in lieu of being broadened by travel in the more usual places, young men educated at Harvard and Yale,

Princeton and Dartmouth ...” Dr. Lightner paused, as if hoping he need not go on.

“Among those young men,” said Hiram Stratton, “is my own son. Do not be uncomfortable with the admission. It is I who am ashamed. He went to Yale, but did not succeed. He has not, in fact, succeeded anywhere. He lacks capacity for anything except failure.”

The French were horrified that a father would speak like that. The British were expressionless. The Germans, of course, had still not bothered to cross the room.

“I’ve come to bring him home,” said Hiram Stratton. “He belongs in prison and I plan to put him there.” The man’s face split open in what must have been a smile. Camilla could not look at it.

“In prison?” repeated Dr. Lightner, appalled. “Surely not, Mr. Stratton. He seems a delightful fellow. Has taken fine pictures. In fact, he’s the one who found the tomb about which I am so excited!”

“I was not blessed with a good son,” said Hiram Stratton. “Throughout his life it has been necessary to curb him. I incarcerated him in an asylum for the good of the community.”

You did not! thought Camilla. You locked him up because he defied you. It was easy to show the factory workers who was boss: burn their jobs. It was easy to show your son, too. Whip Strat until he cringed in the manner you like to see in dogs.

“He escaped,” said Hiram Stratton. “Attacked the staff and vanished. Not only that, he kidnapped two innocent children.”

He did not! They were not children. They went with him joyfully. He was saving them. Their own families do not want them back!

“I have come here,” said Hiram Stratton, “to see Egypt, of course. To admire your excavation, of course. To consider a major donation. But alas, to administer a lasting punishment to my son.” He did not mean that word alas. He gloated.

Camilla had thought that Duffie’s lies were about the nature of St. Rafael’s patients; Duffie feared she would not agree to get near leprosy. How terribly wrong she had been. His lies were about the reason for locating the son. Camilla had not been sent to arrange a joyful reunion. She had been sent so that the father could ruin his own boy.

Camilla had chosen not to believe Katie's version of Strat's character. But Katie, who knew so much of cruelty, had singled Strat out as a true and decent friend.

Why did I not believe Katie? thought Camilla.

Far from ruining Hiram Stratton, she had played into his hands. Not simply locating the boy, but putting the boy into an immensely worse situation. Whatever lies and fabrications Mr. Stratton brought from America, it would be no lie that the missing gold sandal was in Strat's possession; that Strat had dishonored the entire dig; that he was a thief.

"He was also," said the French attaché thoughtfully, "involved in some way in the death of those two young men who fell from the Pyramid."

"No, no," said Dr. Lightner, "we've been through that, he was in no way involved except that I instructed him to deliver the bodies to you."

"Since he is a kidnapper," said Hiram Stratton, "it would not surprise me if he were also a murderer. It is for trial that I bring him back to New York. I spawned a criminal and as a criminal he will be treated."

The man is happy, thought Camilla. He looks forward to throwing his own child to the jackals. He rejoices at the thought of his son suffering.

Why? Because the son is beautiful while he is gross? Because the son is kind while he believes in cruelty? Or because Hiram Stratton, Sr., is truly evil?

Hiram Stratton could not be allowed to continue. Such verbiage would simply ruin the festivities. Lady Clementine and the ambassador's wife bustled about, tugging here and there to line the guests up for their entry into the dining room.

"My dear Miss Matthews," said the French ambassador.

I am not evil, thought Camilla, but I am in its neighborhood. Having placed young Stratton in jeopardy, I must now save him. The sandal, in fact, is minor. Kidnapping and assault are not. I cannot let his father have him.

She smiled at the French ambassador, who said, "Might I escort you to the dinner table, my dear, where if you will be so kind, I will seat you next to our guest of honor."

Camilla's bare arm rubbed against the sleeve of Hiram Stratton's dinner jacket. Her left hand brushed his when she picked up a fork and he a spoon.

She was unable to eat, but in a world where fainting delicate women were prized, failure to eat was much admired. She was unable to speak, but in a world where only the words of men had value, a quiet woman was a jewel.

“My dear Miss Matthews,” said Hiram Stratton, “I detest a woman who babbles and you, dear girl, have a great capacity for silence. What a pleasure. I have never permitted one of my wives to chatter.”

“One of your wives, sir?”

“I am in the midst of divorcing my fourth.”

It was an admission so outrageous, Camilla could not believe he had said it in public. Even to use the word divorce at an elegant gathering like this was vulgar. She trembled at the suffering of those four women, sharing a life and a bed with this monster. “I assume your fourth wife babbled,” she said.

“Precisely.” Hiram Stratton laughed hugely and spilled red wine. “*And* demanded *and* whined *and* argued. A man cannot be expected to put up with that.”

“Of course not,” said Camilla.

“Miss Matthews,” said Hiram Stratton very softly, “you are a fine detective. Nothing escapes you, does it? You should know, my dear, that nothing escapes me either.”

Their eyes met. What could he mean? Had he already discerned that she was making plans for Strat’s escape?

Hidden by the starched white damask tablecloth, the man had the gall to put his hand on her knee. He began to inch her skirt upward, in order to touch her bare skin.

Camilla’s choices were few. To stab him with her fork would be a breach of manners. How would the French feel then about Dr. Lightner, bringing so uncouth a creature to their party? Lady Clementine would take back her dress and her pearls, knowing Camilla had not the grace to handle situations like a lady.

Yet she could not allow it to happen.

It dawned on her that this was what Hiram Stratton referred to. He had noticed Camilla and she belonged to him, having accepted his false letter of introduction and his money, and he would take her in other ways as well.

Camilla could not think clearly. Failure to think clearly had happened to at least four other women in the presence of Hiram Stratton, Sr. She looked desperately at Lady Clementine and found she had underestimated this fine person. Lady Clementine tapped her silver knife gently against a crystal glass, and a sweet note rang out through the room. The ladies stood, and quickly the men rose with them.

Hiram Stratton struggled to join them, his bulk and the difficult position into which he had maneuvered his hands slowing him down.

“Gentlemen,” said the ambassador’s wife graciously, “we leave you to your dessert and brandy, so your conversations may turn to war and politics, while we retire to the garden, and our conversations turn to fashion and weddings.”

A servant pulled Camilla’s chair out for her and the gentlemen bade the ladies *au revoir*. Hiram Stratton said into Camilla’s ear, “Do not forget that you are my employee. You will do all that you are told.” A smirk lay behind his moss mustache. “*All.*”

ANNIE

Annie was very impressed by the clothing placed on her body.

A shift of fine linen hung straight from shoulder to ankle. Over that was placed an entire dress of linked beads, gold and blue and a rich dark red, laced into a thousand one-inch squares. When she moved, the beads rearranged themselves in a chorus of clicks.

Renifer's servant painted Annie's eyes far into her hairline, and into her hair worked a garland of shiny green leaves and bright flowers. On her feet were placed gold sandals, which glowed as if they contained the sun and eternity itself. Annie had never seen workmanship so beautiful, so impossible.

Of course, she might as well have been wearing lead slabs. She did not see how she was going to walk, but it turned out that walking didn't matter. She and Renifer were lifted like dolls into a double sedan chair, placed gently on soft pillows and carried on the shoulders of men whose muscles bulged as they strained.

The streets of Memphis were quiet. It was very late. Most torches had been put out; most music had ended; most people slept.

All afternoon and all evening, Annie had thought about the three dead men, killed, it seemed, by Pankh and Pen-Meru.

There had been police, full of questions; their uniforms and weapons different from police in her time, but their demeanor and posture the same.

With so much coming and going among guards and so much confusion as they shifted things from one tomb to another, Annie could have vanished into the vast acreage of tombs and blocky mausoleums. But Time had surely given her into Renifer's hands for a purpose. It had to be Strat. And yet there had been no sign of him.

It was not fair. She had expected to find Strat. To love and be loved once more. Strat must be above her in time, pushing a trowel into the very sand

on which she stood. Annie felt betrayed and angry. She wanted to yell at somebody, but nobody shared her language. She had tried to comfort Renifer when the girl wept over the farmers plucked from the fields like chicken for dinner.

But Renifer had sunk into a silent despair and nothing brought her out of it.

When they were dressed by the maids, Renifer refused every single piece of gold and jewelry.

Pankh and Pen-Meru were at the door constantly, demanding speed.

The maids were frightened. Annie tried to keep her own composure, but it was difficult, understanding so little of the events, and feeling so very sorry for Renifer, in love with a man who made a habit of stabbing policemen to death.

She and Renifer sat shoulder to shoulder in the litter, Annie's beads making dents in both of them. At last Renifer roused herself. She took Annie's first finger and pressed it against Annie's lips, shaking her head twice: *No*. Then she pressed her own finger against Annie's lips and raised her eyebrows.

She was requesting silence. Annie smiled and nodded agreement, rather proud to be communicating so clearly. With her thumbs, Renifer flattened the edges of Annie's smile away. Again she shook her head.

Whatever they were about to do, it was no laughing matter.

Oh, Strat! thought Annie. What is going to happen? Why aren't you here?

They were carried to the river and aboard the same barge that had been at the Pyramid lagoon that morning. Trimmed in gold, fluttering with flags and bright with paint, it was fit for a king. Along its deck, soldiers swung spears whose shafts were encircled with gold.

Not king, thought Annie. *Pharaoh*.

Khufu himself.

She was to be in the presence of the most powerful man on this earth? When she could not understand what anybody said? When she had seen how readily they murdered people here?

In front of his feet, as in front of the queen's chapel, the deck was silver. In the torchlight, it possessed a mysterious flickering gleam.

She and Renifer were lifted out of the sedan chair, while Pen-Meru and Pankh stepped ahead to kneel. They knelt in the awkward gymnast's perch that Renifer had used, one leg extended behind, other knee touching the floor, forehead pressed against the silver. In such a position, a man was helpless. If an order were given to have them killed, how simple it would be.

Fear was palpable. In their anxiety, people breathed so deeply it almost caused the sails to billow forth.

Annie suddenly realized the men were kneeling to Pharaoh. His throne was so immense, so high, and he so utterly still that she had not seen him. He did not seem to breathe at all. Wrapped against the evening chill in a magnificent cape of leopard skin, a towering crown upon his head, he did not appear to notice the humans at his feet. He did not even seem real.

Perhaps he's a mummy, thought Annie. Perhaps they worship a dead man.

But Pharaoh was very much alive, and very angry.

Whatever Renifer's father said infuriated the king. In one hand was a staff that he pounded against the deck of the ship, and in the other a short whip, which he flailed through the air, causing men to fling themselves flat on the deck.

Renifer was trembling badly. Annie tried to stave off her own fears. Much as she wanted Strat, she hoped he was not here. There was too much danger.

The barge left the wharf and moved slowly on the river, rowed by men sitting below the deck. Annie watched the rising and falling tips of the oars and heard the gentle slap as they entered the Nile.

Abruptly Pharaoh waved Pen-Meru to silence. Pen-Meru dashed his forehead on the deck and Pharaoh stood up. He barked short syllables, angry and quick. Renifer whimpered, and then guided Annie forward. It was almost impossible to move in the beaded dress and the inflexible gold sandals. Renifer positioned Annie in front of Pharaoh, running a hand up Annie's spine to keep her standing, while she herself knelt.

Pharaoh stared at Annie. He seemed made of wood. His eyes blinked slowly and thickly, as if fastened to hinges rarely used.

Courtiers reverently removed the great crown, placing it upon a pedestal designed to hold that amazing headgear. Pharaoh swung the great cape off

his shoulders. He was bare-chested except for a medallion encrusted with jewels, and his muscular body was scarred from some danger he had survived. Claw scrapes, perhaps, from the very leopard whose skin he now wore.

This man, thought Annie, would skin anybody if he felt like it.

But it was Annie whose skin interested Pharaoh.

She tried to breathe as infrequently as he did. To show this man her fear would be a grave error. Not one man or woman on this barge had dared look Pharaoh in the eye. Annie stared right at him. For a moment, their gazes locked: a king and a blue-eyed trespasser from another time.

Her stomach churned. The slabs of gold on her feet seemed to drag her down.

Pharaoh seemed almost to smile, and the smile was one she had seen before. Where? On what face? Because she had certainly never seen his.

The barge arrived at the square lake and the harsh temple. Far down the torchlit causeway loomed his Pyramid, stunning and graceful by night.

Annie and Renifer were lifted once more into their sedan chair, while Pharaoh was placed on a similar, but immensely larger, chair. It took eight men to lift him.

A procession was formed.

Annie had thought Pharaoh would be attended by a cast of thousands. But only a dozen soldiers and a few priests accompanied the king.

They passed through the portals of the stern temple and under the banners of its pillars. They walked with measured pace along the causeway. They passed the chapel where the murders had happened. Renifer held tight to Annie. Her hand felt as thin and cold as bones.

Instead of lighting more torches for more light, the priests doused torches for *less* light.

What dark ceremony, what dark thoughts were soon to be expressed? What dark deeds?

They stopped at the shaft down which Pen-Meru and Pankh and their cohorts had lowered the sarcophagus. Annie and Renifer were lifted from their conveyance and brought to stand next to Pharaoh at the opening in the earth.

The priests chanted, and rocked on their heels, and anointed surfaces with oil from holy vessels. Renifer sang. What a beautiful soprano she

had! The notes soared among the tombs and the dead, echoing off a million stones.

Pharaoh closed his eyes in prayer.

Annie prayed to Time. *Take me to Strat.*

She could hear Time laughing, and turned quickly, but it was Pankh.

RENIFER

Renifer stood with her head bowed and her eyes fixed on her painted toes. She knew now why her father smirked at power. Power was held by those who told the best lies.

For Pharaoh had believed Pen-Meru. He accepted Pankh's lies. Renifer stood in shame as deep as the mud in which peasants toiled.

If Pharaoh did not understand, and she did, was it Renifer's duty to speak the truth? Should she crush Him with the knowledge that His mother's bones were scattered and dishonored?

Pharaoh, God Himself, must bring order to the chaos of living. His power caused the Nile to rise, bringing the water that grew the grain that baked the bread that kept Egypt alive. To upset Pharaoh was to ruin the lives of all. Therefore silence was best.

Or was it?

One priest anointed the site with sacred oils while another burned incense. An acolyte set down a freshly killed duck and a basket of dates.

O Hetepheres! Your interment should include a train of priestesses! Paid musicians and a choir. A parade and seventy days of feasting. Petals of roses strewn for hundreds of yards and fine perfumes distributed among thousands of mourners.

"It's a hundred feet down the shaft, Great King," said Pen-Meru, gleeful with success. "Infinitely more secure than the previous tomb. All was accomplished with speed but sacred dignity. Those laborers who moved her tomb goods have been sent West."

Renifer was sick. So every worker her father had commanded this afternoon had been executed. Oh, the foul deaths for which her father was responsible!

I cannot atone, thought Renifer. No matter what parts of this ritual I do, it will mean nothing.

She washed her face and hands with holy drops and sang to the Nile, because the river was Egypt and Egypt was the river.

When Pharaoh had added His blessing, He said, "The priestess of ivory does not sing?"

"She has no language, sire," said Renifer.

Seven times, she stepped forward and then backward to sanctify the shaft. Kissing each one, she placed before the new tomb four amulets: cat, scarab, cow and ibis. From a spun-glass goblet of holy water, Renifer sipped first, and then gave each person present a taste of the holy water. Even the girl of ivory.

The ritual was complete.

Pharaoh stepped up to the hole and gazed steadily down the open shaft.

Nobody dared speak. Perhaps the God was praying in His heart. Or perhaps He had some plan of which He had not yet spoken.

"In very ancient times," said the Living God slowly, "a queen was buried with her living servants. I sometimes wonder if it is sufficiently reverent to allow dolls to represent those servants."

The hundreds of dolls which represented palace staff had of course been stolen early on. They were easy to sell. Well-to-do people needed them for their own burials and never asked when the dolls had been made or for whom.

Pharaoh flicked a wrist and two of His palace guards stepped forward. They carried between them a long open box, whose weight caused their muscles to bulge and quiver with effort. It contained gold. Necklaces were draped over tiaras, earrings tumbled through arm-pieces, bracelets tangled among pectorals.

Pankh and Pen-Meru gasped. Only Renifer knew that it was not with reverence. It was with greed.

"For the most part," said Pharaoh, "I agree with the new theory of symbolism. For the most part, I agree that when the queen my mother is given eternal life, her servants will arise to wait upon her. But the queen my mother has been wrenched from the resting place she herself prepared."

"It is so," spoke the listeners, because agreeing with a king was always correct. It was not permitted to look into Pharaoh's eyes, but that was easy, because their eyes were fastened on all that gold.

“The beautiful silent priestess, the color of ivory,” said Pharaoh, “will be perfect.”

Pen-Meru nodded.

Pankh nodded.

The soldiers, the priest and his acolyte nodded.

Renifer nodded. Ancient custom might erase some of what her family had done. Only the whitest bulls and cows were sacrificed, and was this not the whitest of females? Had not Renifer’s own nurse seen from the first that the girl was intended for sacrifice?

The girl of ivory was not aware of their survey, nor had she any way of knowing what Pharaoh had just decreed: that she was to serve Hetepheres for eternity. She was staring at Pharaoh’s Pyramid as if she could not believe that she stood beside it.

Soon, thought Renifer, you will stand below it.

It was imperative that the girl should neither scream nor fight. She must not understand what was happening. Normally she would have been given a special drink to prepare her body, but none was prepared for this event. Renifer wondered how to be sure that the girl participated graciously and fully.

An extraordinary thing occurred. Pharaoh Himself began to clothe her in the gold he had brought along. Around her neck He fastened a gold pectoral of spread wings, which not only covered her throat but fell almost to her waist. He Himself adjusted the weight behind her neck to keep the pectoral at the right height. One by one, He slid gleaming bracelets over her wrist and past the curve of her elbow, until her arms were solid with gold.

When He was done, the girl could scarcely have moved, so weighted was she now by gold. And such was the glory of gold that the girl was hypnotized by it. They needed no specially prepared drink to control her behavior. Wearing the gold was her drug.

It is good, thought Renifer. Her heart eased, knowing that the queen had this lovely servant for eternity.

Pharaoh studied the awesome triangle of His Pyramid. When at last He spoke, His voice seemed directed to the stars in the sky. “Such a perfect sacrifice,” He said finally, “must have an escort into the tomb.”

Pankh and Pen-Meru stiffened with panic. If Pharaoh designated a priest to go down the shaft, the priest would see there were hardly any tomb furnishings; that the seal on the sarcophagus was brand new and the tomb pitifully small for a queen. He would bellow the news, Pharaoh Himself might descend, and all would be executed after all.

“It worries me a little,” said Pharaoh, “that the girl of ivory might cry out and defile the moment of her sacrifice.”

There was sand and dust and the cold wind of night.

Renifer with her bare shoulders shivered.

Pharaoh looked into her eyes and she tried to keep her eyes on the ground where they belonged, but her eyes were caught on His and she could not even blink.

“Perhaps, my little singer of song,” said Khufu, his smile broad and kingly, “you would lead the sacrifice into the tomb. With you by her side, she will be smiling.”

Renifer listened to the faint lap of water from the lagoon, the distant voices of the crew on the barge. Khufu was asking her to travel down into the tomb. He was not suggesting that she would ever travel back out of it.

Her father said, “What an honor for my daughter, Great King.”

Her once beloved said, “What an honor for my bride, Great King.”

Wind whistled through stones stacked for future tombs.

“Will you, little singer of song, do me this honor?” asked Pharaoh.

As if Renifer had a choice. As if she were permitted to say, “No, thank you,” and go home to her mother.

To the Lord of the Two Lands, Renifer said, “I will.”

ANNIE

Annie did not see how they were all going to descend into Hetepheres' tomb. Especially her. With all this gold she probably weighed as much as the Statue of Liberty.

Renifer was lowered first, in a basket, like some scary ride at an amusement park. Annie was clearly next, then Pharaoh himself. Renifer held a torch in her hand but Annie was not given one. Renifer was lowered gently and without any bumping or lurching. Annie swallowed nervously and went down after her.

Pharaoh said something, his thin smile flickering like a flame or a snake's tongue.

That's who he reminds me of, she thought. A viper.

She was relieved when her basket fell below the level of the earth and beyond the power of his eyes. The shaft was very steep. She touched gouges in the stone, toeholds, perhaps for those without ropes or baskets.

At the bottom of the shaft, yet more gold glittered in the light of Renifer's torch.

Where do they get all this gold? she thought. Is Egypt full of gold mines? Or do they send pirates abroad, to loot and pillage?

At the bottom, she was surprised and disappointed. It was just a small stone room. Nothing there except the few pieces shifted from the other tomb. The vast sarcophagus, the bed canopy, the sedan chair. The gold she had seen from higher up was just one tray, far less than she had on her own body.

Well, it sure isn't Tutankhamen's tomb, she thought. But probably this is just the outer room. Once we start exploring, we'll see the better rooms.

She wondered what ceremonies would take place underground.

She could hear Pharaoh being lowered, his basket not coming down quite so lightly as her own, for it seemed to smack the walls. She looked

toward the shaft, but the feet of Pharaoh did not appear. A great slab was being lowered on ropes. Renifer's torchlight showed it to be no beautiful painted object. Just rock.

Annie could make no sense of it.

When the huge stone had settled onto the bottom, the person above let go of the ropes. They fell into a coil of their own. Were she and Renifer meant to do something with those ropes?

A second stone was lowered onto the ropes from the first stone. Together, the two stones sealed the shaft. There was no longer an opening. Nobody else could come down.

Nobody could go back up, either.

A terrible racket began. It took Annie several moments to realize that rocks were being dropped down the shaft. Rocks that hit and ricocheted and echoed. Filling the shaft. Filling it for eternity.

Annie and Renifer were being buried alive.

V



Time for Ghosts

STRAT

Strat was sitting about ten courses up the Pyramid, feet dangling, head resting in the corner made by two huge stones. Across the Giza plateau, by carriage and sedan chair, by donkey and camel came the party guests, having spent the night in Cairo, and only now returning to the dig.

Miss Matthews and Dr. Lightner were astride donkeys so small their feet dragged in the dust. Strat hoped Miss Matthews had enjoyed herself. In his youth, he had been to many parties and enjoyed them. But he was nineteen now and felt no desire to attend more. The girl whose company had made him happy had been lost.

He was touched to see the stern Archibald Lightner so smitten. It was in part Miss Matthews' height: Dr. Lightner need not stoop to deal with her, as if she were a child. It was in part her independence. Elderly British ladies traveled alone all the time (although of course with a maid and a companion). But Miss Matthews had come truly alone, not even a maid. Strat tried to imagine a father or brother permitting her to be a reporter at all, let alone voyage by herself to a place quite primitive.

Laughing, Dr. Lightner and Miss Matthews dismounted easily, since they were taller than their rides, and walked the last quarter mile holding hands. Strat wanted to embrace them both in his joy for them.

He could hardly wait to tell the archaeologist about his latest discovery.

When the great man had left yesterday evening for Cairo, the entire camp had been distressed by the missing gold sandal. All spirits had sunk. Had the only true treasure in the tomb waited thousands of years—only to be stolen in 1899?

This morning, Dr. Lightner's college assistants had decided to search every tent and trunk, but Strat, unwilling to trespass upon the belongings of others, continued his own investigation. He had convinced himself that if *one* pile of rock turned out to be plaster hiding a tomb entrance, *another*

pile of rock would surely turn out to be plaster, and hiding a tomb entrance.

Since dawn, he had been walking about with a small ball peen hammer, swinging it against rocks, hoping each time for a sifting of plaster. A hour ago, such an event had occurred.

Strat put up no flag to mark the location, but he knew exactly where it was. If he paced parallel to the causeway precisely forty-six steps, heel pressed against toe, from Hetepheres' shaft, he would see the tiny white smash mark of his hammer on a long flat thin stone.

A surprisingly large group was returning with Dr. Lightner. Clearly he intended to show off his excavation to many who had attended the French party. Strat hoped the gold sandal had been located by now, as it was sure to impress the visitors.

He recognized two German scholars from a dig in Saqqara; two Italians who wished to study Dr. Lightner's finds; a handful of British army officers; the hieroglyphic expert; and even the French military attaché.

Finally, in a small open carriage pulled by two straining donkeys, their keeper hitting them continually with sticks lest they give up and fall down, rode a very heavy man, all belly and jowls, with a dusty wrinkled hide like a rhinoceros.

No, thought Strat. It cannot be.

He closed his eyes for a moment, and tried again. The image did not change.

It was good that he wasn't at the top of the Pyramid, Strat thought, or he would have followed the example of the two young Frenchmen, and just rolled off. Arriving dead at the bottom would be better than encountering his father.

Father was a word that should be precious, redolent of respect and honor; of example and pride. This was not the case for Strat.

What mattered to his father were investments. All life was an investment: a servant, a wife, a factory, a dinner party. All investments must pay off or be discarded. At no time would a losing investment be kept ... even if that investment were his only son.

Chained up in the asylum, Strat had promised God that if he ever got out, he would not follow his father's example. Rather, he would help

others. Much harder, he would accept help, and not arrogantly insist that he could stand alone.

But it was Katie who had fulfilled those promises. She was help even to lepers beneath the feet of the Lord. And her greatest gift, the one that dazzled and shamed him, came when Katie chose to say good-bye, so Strat might have a life unencumbered by a deformed girl he could not forever pretend was his sister.

I have helped nobody, he thought now. I have leaped into adventure and thrown away my promise. And the Lord knows exactly how I have behaved.

Dizzily, Strat stared at Hiram Stratton clambering out of the carriage. Now Father stood inside Strat's new life; touched Strat's tent and cot; spoke to Strat's friends and colleagues.

How could Hiram Stratton, Sr., have located Strat? And why would he care enough to travel all the way to Egypt? His father loathed exercise and particularly loathed hot weather. What could he be doing here? Such a man might have anything in mind, but not anything good.

A commotion sprang up among the tents, of course. His father could not bear peace or calm. He must have action and argument. He must provoke and antagonize, because destroying the serenity of others demonstrated power. Nobody, not anywhere on this earth, not even in the desert, could hide from the personality of Hiram Stratton, Sr.

From this distance Strat was indistinguishable from the hordes of tourists, both European and Egyptian, climbing and picnicking on the rugged edges of Khufu's Pyramid. In a trice, Strat could mingle with the crowd below; buy from a vendor a robe of the sort worn by local men. He could wind around his head a turban and then hire a camel. He could vanish up the Nile, as British troops were vanishing into the misty unknown of darkest Africa.

This time he would be sufficiently intelligent to use another name.

Strat slipped down from his perch. What name to use? Perhaps Annie's. He could call himself Lockwood. Yes, that was it. He would be Strat Lockwood.

Yet if he fled, he would lose the respect of Dr. Lightner; lose his precious camera; lose Katie's letters; lose the chance to become a brilliant

photographer; lose the glorious moment in which he showed Dr. Lightner the second tomb entrance he had found.

And lose, above all, the miniature envelope with the lock of Annie Lockwood's shining black hair.

Strat looked up at the peak of the Pyramid, five hundred feet above. The sky around those bronze stones was blue as a child's paint box. There had Strat knelt and asked Time to give Annie back to him.

In a few short weeks, a new century would arrive: the twentieth. Its first decade would belong to science and science alone. And here was Strat, abandoning rational thought, pretending Time was a power to move souls.

It might even be that Father was correct, and Strat *had* lost his sanity when he believed in the existence of a girl from another time.

At the dig, men were running back and forth and gesticulating. He could tell Dr. Lightner and Miss Matthews apart by their great height and he could tell his father by his great width.

Strat walked behind the Sphinx, briefly blinded by the shock of shadow. Usually when he stood by the Sphinx, the past overwhelmed him, but now he felt only the future. Future hovered around the great paws and blew sand on its back. Future gnawed its face and chewed its broken nose.

In Father's presence, he thought, my future is also broken, swallowed in the desert of his hatred. But I will not flinch from it. I will not run.

He squared his shoulders. He would not go slouching and timid into his father's presence.

The sand across which he trekked sucked at his boots and the wind tore at his face. The blue sky turned slightly yellow as the sand whirled across it.

The members of the dig saw Strat coming and they grew silent and still. Strat had the appalling thought that it was not his father of whom he must be afraid, but his companions. How could that be?

The visiting scholars, the French attaché, the Egyptians, the college boys ... all in a row, staring at him. They looked like a firing line. Strat wanted to bolt, but kept his stride even and his face calm. He wondered what his father would say to him, after two years with no word between them.

But it was Archibald Lightner who spoke. "You lied to me, young Stratton. You claimed mere estrangement from your father. In fact, you are

an escapee from an asylum, where you were incarcerated for the safety of your neighbors. You attacked and badly hurt an innocent physician who dedicated his life to helping his desperate patients. Most wretchedly, you kidnapped an innocent girl and defiled her to accomplish your escape.”

That he could be accused of hurting Katie! Katie whom he loved as a sister! And that anybody could call Dr. Wilmott a dedicated innocent physician! The man was a monster who had delighted in torturing the helpless, smiling as they suffered.

Anyway, Strat had just hit him over the head with a lamp. Far from being badly hurt, Dr. Wilmott gave chase himself.

“And *now*,” cried Dr. Lightner, “you have defiled my excavation!”

Strat could not believe that statement. What of his contribution to the dig? His photographs, saving for all time the accomplishments of the entire group?

“You stole that gold sandal,” accused Dr. Lightner. “You squirreled it away in your own bag. You who travel so lightly, burdened only with lies, no doubt planning to run away and continue your life against society.”

The insult was too deep to be borne. That he would take a possession belonging to another man? Never!

The wind rose higher, engulfing them in dust, drying their throats and hurting their eyes, making them hotter and angrier.

At last the father spoke to the son he had not seen in two years. “I had you found,” said Hiram Stratton. “I hired a detective. I plan to bring you back to America to stand trial for kidnapping and attempted murder. I considered the possibility that you were attempting to become a better person and thus deserved mercy. But I arrive to find you are a common thief.”

“Father, I stole nothing. I never have. Nor did I hurt Katie in any way.”

“I stand here as future patron to this excavation,” thundered his father, “and this is what I must deal with first. The low base treachery of my own son.”

Patron? Impossible. His father had never shown generosity. Unless, of course, he got something in exchange. And what might that be? The Stratton name on a museum wing? Strat doubted that his father had ever entered a museum.

“You stole the gold,” said his father. “Nor can you deny it. You hid it deep inside your own miserable pile of clothing.” Gladly, he waved the gold sandal as proof.

Strat, aghast, looked at his former friends. They met his eyes steadily and with contempt. “I found it,” said the boy from Princeton. “Hidden among your clothes.”

How could it have gotten there? It could only be that he had some enemy; some person in this very company who wished to destroy him.

His eyes sought understanding, and found it immediately. Miss Matthews, head and shoulders above the gloating bulk of Hiram Stratton, was staring out into the desert, cheeks red, chin high and eyes wet.

She stole the sandal, thought Strat, and made it look as if I did. She must be the detective Father hired. Father paid her to make me a thief.

Poor Dr. Lightner, in love with one who betrayed people for a living. There was no point in accusing her. Father paid so well. Impossible for truth to override that much money.

He faced his father again, and saw in his father’s hand, almost invisible in the grip of that fat thumb and forefinger, the tiny envelope in which Strat kept Annie’s lock of hair. It was the only possession Strat could never replace. Father, too, was a thief, having taken it from Strat’s Bible, where it lay pressed when he did not keep it against his heart.

He made the error of showing that it mattered. Father, quick to see the weakness of others, opened the envelope and shook out the contents. The wind, which swirled around knees and raced, dust-laden, through shirts, now whisked away the silken tresses of Annie’s hair and flung them out across the sand.

Strat’s heart opened as if a wrench had been applied, turning until his valves burst and his heart broke.

“It is my belief,” said the French attaché, stepping forward, “that you are also a murderer, young Stratton. Tell us how the two young men fell from the Pyramid.”

“I thought it was an accident!” cried Dr. Lightner’s Yale aide.

“Surely it was just carelessness,” said one of the Germans, who had little use for the standards of the French.

“It was the work of ghosts,” said an Egyptian.

“You heard Mr. Stratton,” argued the French attaché. “In America, the boy tried to kill. In Egypt, he succeeded.”

Just so had false accusations landed Strat in the asylum. His father was an expert at arranging the lies of strangers. Strat thought of Annie, who had saved him once. The wind increased, so that the sand it flung was painful to bare skin. All of Strat was raw: heart and hope. There was no Annie to save him this time, and he would never have wanted her here. She was the very reason Father had had him locked up, and Father would recognize her. He trembled to think what Hiram Stratton, Sr., would do to her. Desperately, Strat revoked his plea to Time.

“We will lock him up,” said the French attaché grandly, looking forward to having an American behind bars.

“No, we will lock him up,” said a British army officer, appalled that the French might have any power in a British protectorate.

“No,” said Dr. Lightner decisively. “This has occurred in my establishment and it is my choice to put the young man under house arrest. He will not be shackled nor placed under lock and key. He will not be handed over to Egyptian authorities nor British. I wish to give you the opportunity, young Stratton, to demonstrate that you are a man of honor. Should you run, it will be proof of guilt. An innocent man has nothing to run from.”

This is like a witch hunt in Old Salem, thought Strat. If I am innocent, I will be taken home to be punished. If I am guilty, I will be taken home to be punished.

But the gentlemen of Egypt, France, Italy, England, Germany and America, to whom honor was everything, awaited his response.

“I give you my word,” said Strat quietly. “I am under house arrest. Under house arrest I will stay.”

CAMINA

Camilla forced herself to look at the young man Katie had asked her to honor. Instead, Camilla had wronged him. The son was innocent of all charges, past and present. Far from avenging her own father, Camilla had sunk to the level of Strat's father.

She must find a way to save Strat. If nothing more, she owed Katie that.

But a curious thing was happening. The boy seemed to have forgotten his accusers and his witnesses. He had turned slightly, and was staring toward the Pyramid, looking at once both bewildered and excited. He took a quick shocked breath and held it, his shoulders high and motionless.

Camilla, too, looked toward the Pyramid. She caught a glimpse of shining gold, half-seen, as through gauze. There was a rasp of shoes on sand and a girl's laughter, half-heard, as through a door. It was Time, leaving its ghosts and passing on.

Camilla did not faint, but she lost strength and balance. People cried, "Are you all right?" and said to one another, "It's the heat. Put her in the shade. Put a wet cloth on her forehead."

Hiram Stratton, Sr., having lost his son's attention, grabbed Strat's arm. When Strat jerked free, all the men jumped forward to prevent a fight. Or perhaps to encourage one.

Miss Matthews was walked into her tent by Dr. Lightner, for only he was tall enough to take her arm. Dr. Lightner ducked beneath the tent flap and set her gently on the edge of her cot. Anxiously, he fanned her face with the brim of his canvas hat. Through the tent opening, she could see the broken nose of the Sphinx.

To every tourist the Sphinx was a mystery that must be plumbed. All paused before it to cry, Who are you? From whence do you spring?

Who am I? thought Camilla Matthews. I who rejected my gender, my family, my honor and my faith.

Egyptians had worshiped the Nile and the sun, their kings and their mummified cats. How strange and marvelous were all religions: the eternal need to find greater substance.

Camilla had shrugged over greater things. Immersing herself in low and ugly deeds, she had created a low and ugly situation. "Oh, Dr. Lightner," she said desperately. "I must confess that I have done a terrible thing."

"Nonsense," he said roundly. "Here. A damp cloth will cool your thoughts."

Pressing the comforting cotton against her burning eyes, Camilla made her confession. "I set young Mr. Stratton up for this crime. I took that gold sandal. Yes, it was I. I placed it in the young man's trunk so you would blame him. He is innocent."

Relief washed over Camilla. At last, she had done a good thing. She might be flung out of camp or thrown onto the next ship. She even might be the one sent to prison. But at least Strat would not suffer at her hands. She risked a humiliated glance at Dr. Lightner.

But he was regarding her with great esteem. A soft smile crossed his face. "Nothing," said Dr. Lightner, "is so beautiful as a woman who sacrifices for a man. Miss Matthews, how kind and generous is your feminine heart. You wish to save the boy from punishment. How I respect you. But no one will believe that trumped-up story. Your truthfulness and honor are visible to all who have met you."

It had not occurred to Camilla that she would not be believed. "Truly, sir, it was my doing. I committed the act."

"Now, now. You have enough troubles merely enduring the great heat. Ladies should not be here at this time of year. As for the theft of the sandal, it is too much for your feminine sensibilities to accept that some men are evil and do evil things. I think it best for your sake to remove you to Lady Clementine's abode. She delighted in your company, as of course do I, but her villa is better for you than this hot and dusty encampment."

"But you must explain to everyone, Dr. Lightner, what really happened. Especially it must be made clear to the French, who have jumped to dreadful conclusions."

"Dear girl, we know what really happened. Young Stratton is his father all over again. I fear he does not deserve your assistance. One day he too

will clench a cigar in his teeth, looking and smelling like the smokestack of his factory. He too will burn down that factory in order to get his way.”

Camilla gave a little cry and hid once more behind his handkerchief.

“You know of that fire?” His arm had gone around her shoulder and she felt the comforting heat of his body. “That factory burned when I was in America raising money for this expedition,” he told her. “Innocent people died in that fire. I’m told there was no investigation. Mr. Stratton simply paid off everyone involved.”

Not everyone, thought Camilla. I wonder if Mama would have accepted his money, if he had offered it, to keep us in school. I accepted money from him. Passing it through Mr. Duffie’s hands does not cleanse it. I am a sinner with my hands dipped in Stratton money.

Oh, there were too many moral problems here, and she without her church. “I do not think young Strat is like his father,” she said. Tears filled her eyes, she who was supposed to be like a man and never weep. She could not help quoting Katie. “I think he is a good and decent and generous boy.”

She was talking as if she really were a decade older than Strat, but in fact she was two years younger. Remembering that she was only seventeen made her want to behave seventeen, and weep on Dr. Lightner’s shoulder, and be taken care of. But that was not her lot in life, and she must not weaken.

Dr. Lightner burst out, “How touched I am by your tender heart! No matter what your height and frame say of boldness and strength, in fact you are gentle and full of love. Willing to sacrifice so that a young man might go free! Oh, Miss Matthews.”

Camilla had completed the task of making him fall in love with her, weeks ahead of schedule. He was too good for her and she must walk away from him, but perhaps she could use the trap she had set for Dr. Lightner to undo the trap she had set for Strat.

“Honored sir,” said Camilla shakily, “might we discuss a way to extricate the boy from his father’s grasp? Such a wicked man does not tell the truth. I believe Hiram Stratton lies even about his son. I believe there were no such events as the kidnapping and the attack. Please. Let us conjure a way to set Strat free.”

Dr. Lightner fiddled with some shards of pottery on which undeciphered hieroglyphs awaited his expertise. His thumb stroked letters incised thousands of years ago by a scribe. "If you have fallen in love with the young man, Miss Matthews," he said bravely, "I will do all within my power to assist you in saving him."

Camilla dropped the handkerchief and all pretense. How gallant he was! And how she agreed that nothing was more beautiful than one person sacrificing for another. "I have fallen in love with you, sir. But I am in a position to know that the father is truly evil and to extricate the son I do require your utmost assistance."

Dr. Lightner wrapped her hand tightly in his and kissed the top of it. "Do you mean that?" he whispered. "That you—that you—" The words were too intimate to be repeated.

Camilla nodded.

"Here is a way out then," he said. He patted her hair and cheeks, afraid to overstep his rights, but too emotional to keep a correct distance. "The British love war so very deeply. The wars in India have run out, and war in the Sudan may end within days, but luckily, war looms in South Africa. Those Dutchmen down there, Boers they call themselves, are trying to throw the British out. Everybody is happy. There's nothing like a good fight. I shall suggest young Stratton to my British friends as a cameraman. Off he goes to fight the Dutch. Thousands of miles once more between him and his father. This time we shall see that he uses a false name."

It was perfect! Strat would be saved. On her way back to America, Camilla would disembark in Spain to give Katie money and news. She would tell the truth about her own foul deeds and then she would find the priest of the convent at the hospital, and tell him the truth also. She would get her religion back if she got nothing else, and once home, she would no longer spy for Mr. Duffie. Somehow she would keep her brothers in school, but not that way.

Maybe I really could sell my first article as Strat sold his first picture, she thought, and from there go on to a splendid career. I shall be a spinster, but with fewer regrets, for I shall shine on my own.

Dr. Lightner stood. "I shall go then, and see how this may be managed."

Camilla looked into his face and immediately had more, not fewer, regrets. She did not want to be a spinster. She wanted Archibald Lightner.

“And the French?” she said, jumping up. “What about their silly accusation?”

“Please, my dear. Sit back down and rest. The heat tired you.”

“I’m over it,” said Camilla crossly. “How will you handle the French?” She opened the tent flap for him instead of the other way around.

He laughed. “I don’t know yet. First, let’s make sure the young man himself will go along with our plan.”

STRAT

The gold sandal had been set upon the dusty table where Dr. Lightner wrote up his notes in the evening. It seemed to Strat that the slipper actually sang: an ancient high quaver, a golden voice from the past. He touched the delicately incised gold rope under which a girl's toes had once slid.

Strat's heart actually stopped. It hit his ribs once, with a huge thrust of energy, and then it ceased to beat.

Annie had worn that sandal.

Around him, the figures and their speech glazed, as raw umber over oils on a painting. The angry men grew solid and still, fixing themselves as people on paper. There was light and shadow and heat. There was not sound.

A camel train appeared on the horizon, like liquid slowly poured over the sand, long black shadows spilled behind.

And Strat spilled out of the picture, falling and tumbling, like the French boys from the top of the Pyramid. His bones smashed against its rocky sides, and Strat could not understand this, because he was not on the Pyramid, but on the sand. His skin was laid open by the scrape and assault of the stones. His mind broke apart, thoughts scattered like seed from a clumsy hand.

He spun into the vortex of the past. There were faces with him: hideous, unknown others being wrenched through Time.

And then he hit bottom, and it was stone.

CAMINA

The members of Dr. Lightner's dig were turning in circles in the sand, like dogs deciding whether to lie down. The German scholars and the French attaché were puzzled and embarrassed. They could not produce Strat for Dr. Lightner and Miss Matthews.

"Where did you put your son?" Camilla demanded of Mr. Stratton. "Surely you have not already incarcerated him? It was agreed that he would stay upon his honor."

Mr. Stratton was bewildered and angry. "He was here a moment ago."

"He ran," opined the French attaché.

"He couldn't have," objected the Yale assistant. "He must be here. We'll help you look, Miss Matthews."

But nobody could find Strat. There was not a trace of him.

"He has fled," said Dr. Lightner sadly.

"Proof of guilt!" said Hiram Stratton gladly.

"Strat said he would put himself under house arrest," said Camilla through stiff lips. "He will be back by dark. He gave his word, and I accept that."

Oh, Strat, she thought, if you are not back ...

No man here will forgive you for breaking your word. Even Dr. Lightner may refuse to help you after all.

STRAT

Above Strat spread a sky vast and dark, pierced by a thousand stars and a sliver of moon. Torches burned in tall posts, illuminating pyramid, pillar and stone.

He stood exactly where he had been standing in another time, fifty feet from the causeway. He had arrived at the beginning, when Khufu's Pyramid was perfect. It was a ghost, or he was.

Strat's breath came in shallow spurts, as if he were afraid of antique air. Slowly his lungs returned, his legs and strength, and he could feel again the sweet beating of his heart.

He was surrounded by temples and mastabas and monuments he could not identify because they did not exist in 1899. He could not see the Sphinx. The causeway, mostly destroyed or buried in his time, was lined with statues, covered by awnings and scented by flowers in massive pots.

He became aware of a steady, rhythmic tapping. He turned and looked toward the Nile. The sound of feet marching, he decided; guards, perhaps, walking back and forth during their night watch. Partially visible through the tall pillars of an open temple, motionless in the water of a lagoon that had vanished long before Strat's time, lay a large and well-lit boat. Although he judged the hour to be very late, there was a good deal of activity on its deck.

It seemed best not to attract attention. Strat stayed well away from the torchlight.

First he would examine the Pyramid. He had climbed it, photographed it, fallen in love with it—but only its core. Think of seeing it as Khufu's architects had planned! Strat was astonished to see a wall around the Pyramid, with the obvious intent of preventing visitors from scaling the monument. The year 1899 had its advantages after all; you need not just stand at the bottom and stare up.

Suddenly he saw the Sphinx. It existed, not half-broken, but half-carved.

O mystery of mysteries, thought Strat reverently. You are a creation of man, and that man must be Khufu!

He was startled by a sudden clatter and some sharply issued orders.

In ancient Egyptian! He was thrilled. He strained to hear, for nobody in 1899 knew how to pronounce the words so painstakingly translated from hieroglyphs.

A phalanx of soldiers was forming near the lagoon. They marched through the temple, pivoted sharply and turned onto the causeway. Their boots and the shafts of their spears slammed against the pavement. Strat drew deeper in the shadows. There were not many soldiers, and yet the sound they made was the sound of many: the relentless echo of men who would show no mercy and give no quarter ... men not unlike his own father.

The procession was both beautiful and threatening. In the midst of the soldiers was carried a huge litter. Strat could not see the occupant, but he recognized the tall crown from tomb paintings: the headgear of the Lord of the Two Lands.

Pharaoh.

The man was so motionless in his litter that Strat decided this was a representation of the Lord of the Two Lands, and not the king himself.

All too aware of his khaki-colored trousers and shirt, Strat dropped down into the sand, that he might cast no shadow. The sand was cold, having no capacity to hold heat. The desert that had failed to roast a man by day tried to freeze him by night. Strat shivered. Farther out in the sand, a high vicious yapping began.

A pack of wild dogs? No, he thought, this is Egypt. *Jackals.*

The jackals were much too close and far too interested. Also not unlike his father.

Next in the procession came men who seemed neither soldier nor priest, another litter and more soldiers.

Fearful of discovery, Strat inched backward over the sand, although moving into range of the jackals did not seem wise either. But the parade stopped well away from him. They did not pause in front of one of the temples or mastabas or baby pyramids. They gathered, it seemed to Strat, around a shadowy circle in the causeway itself.

He squinted to see better, and writhed in the sand for a better angle. It looked like a manhole, like a—

Strat was embarrassed. This was ancient Egypt. There was no room for confusion under these circumstances. It must be a tomb entrance.

Pharaoh's litter was set down. Soldiers assisted Pharaoh out of it. They removed his crown and he himself swung off his cape. So he was real. His chest was as hung with medals and ribbons and sashes as any British officer bound for war. He was spectacular.

There were prayers, with hands held up to the sky; there was anointing with oil; there was sharing of the cup.

From the second litter, two girls in white gowns were brought forward. One knelt, kissed the ground, and sang from a kneeling position. The cool high notes of her psalm rang between the vast stones, echoing in the night air. Was she a priestess? A daughter or wife of Khufu?

Strat knew the name of Khufu's mother, Hetepheres; he was sure he could hear those syllables in the girl's song. Now he recognized the notes. It was the song of the gold sandal, when he had held it in his hands.

As the ceremony went on, ropes were rigged. Two rock slabs were hauled across the sand, each perhaps four feet across and six or eight inches thick. Heavy, but nothing compared to the two-ton stones that made up the Pyramid. Many baskets, also containing something very heavy, were carried up.

The second girl sang nothing and did nothing, but stood motionless. She wore so much gold that she herself was scarcely visible.

Now Khufu himself spoke, and even the jackals were silent as Pharaoh expanded his voice, and his orders filled the City of the Dead.

The singer was lifted into a sort of basket on ropes and lowered gently into the tomb. The girl wrapped in gold was put into the next basket and also lowered. Torches dipped forward, in fascination or reverence. There was a great spill of light and the second girl was no longer shadow under jewels. Strat could see her features and her eyes.

It was Annie.

He had hardly begun rejoicing at the marvelous ways of Time—the miraculous conjunction of souls—the perfect meeting soon to occur in the perfect place—when the next lowering into the shaft occurred.

It was not a priest or a soldier who went down. It was the first rock-hewn slab.

Promptly, the second slab was lowered over the first, and the men began a great and dreadful warbling. They hooted like robed birds gone mad, bowing and nodding to the earth. Then, one by one, man by man, they emptied the baskets down the shaft. Sand and rock and pebble.

Filling it.

ANNIE

Annie and Renifer were in a small room with a large bed. The pile of soft pillows awaited. So did death. It was a parody of a slumber party. But they had not dressed Annie for a party. They had dressed her for eternity.

She did not speak to Renifer and Renifer did not speak to her, because they shared no language and because there was nothing to say.

Annie took off the magnificent necklace, the crown, the thick bracelets, the anklets and amulets. She laid them in a row at the foot of the bed. Gold was beautiful, but you could not, in fact, take it with you. When she slithered out of the netted gown, its bright beads tumbled onto the floor, tangled beyond hope. She slid out of the gold sandals but when her bare feet touched the stone floor, she couldn't stand it. There might be spiders or beetles or rats down here. So she kept the sandals on and fingered the pleats in her stiff white undergown.

Time, you vicious spirit. How could you do this to me? Renifer's torch will burn out. We will sit in the dark while we suffocate.

Annie had contemplated death, of course. All thinking people contemplate death. Her own age was particularly fascinated with it. Whenever they had a poetry assignment, half the kids wrote about death. But none of them ever expected to sit inside their own tomb with lots of time to consider the future of their own dead body.

I am going to become a mummy, she thought.

Annie had read that the Egyptians had not really needed to mummify their dead; the desert would do it for them. Egypt was so dry that bodies behaved like autumn leaves, turning color and turning crispy.

The torch had burned down too low for Renifer to hold it anymore. She set the bit of flaming wood against the stone sarcophagus, where it burned brightly, casting shadows along the incised hieroglyphs. The ceiling was

quite high. Annie watched the smoke rise. Perhaps she should breathe deeply and get it over with.

It was uncommon for an American to feel helpless. Annie's generation and country did not believe in that kind of thing. If you had character and intelligence, you did not permit yourself to be helpless. You solved everything.

Annie would not solve this.

She would not solve thirst, hunger, fear or rage. She would not teach Renifer to speak English, so they could mourn together. She would not dismantle the tomb from the inside, nor tug away granite slabs as large as picnic tables and then empty the shaft so she could climb up.

Instead, she would listen to her heartbeat and wonder what it would be like when that stopped. And then it would stop.

The torch flickered. Annie did not think she could bear being in total dark. "Renifer," she whispered.

Renifer took Annie into her arms and sang gently, as in a lullabye.

Rock me to sleep, thought Annie. Let me not remember in my sleep that I have been buried alive. Let me not wake, but just drift away and not have to feel what is happening to me.

And as she fell asleep, she understood what Time had done.

In 1899, Strat was going to dig up bones that had been interred for thousands of years.

And they would be Annie's.

VI



Time to Die

RENIFER

Renifer hoped she would be the first to die. It was bad enough to lie next to an empty sarcophagus in the dark. She didn't want to lie next to the corpse of the girl of ivory. Renifer's mouth was dry. Thirst was not yet torture, but that would come. She and the girl of ivory would not die easily.

She could neither pray nor summon happy memories. The image of her mother shopping, her little brothers playing ball, her sister stealing her eye makeup, her girlfriends casting eyes at Pankh—none of these could she remember.

She pictured instead the hand of her father dropping a rock as his contribution to the sealing of his living daughter's tomb. The smile of Pankh as he took his turn. How Pharaoh would honor them. How their careers would soar.

I do not mind dying for thee, O queen, thought Renifer. But to die while Father and Pankh laugh at Pharaoh! To die neither embalmed nor prayed over, while Father and Pankh are given tombs in the best part of the City of the Dead. I mind that.

Pankh had not spoken to Renifer as she was led to her fate. He had touched his forehead to the ground at Pharaoh's feet, but he had not touched the cheek or hand of his beloved. Nor had he touched the girl of ivory. His eyes had done that for him: caressing the gold she wore. In Pankh's eyes had been heat and excitement such as Renifer herself had never generated.

It was lust for gold.

Pankh will rob this tomb, thought Renifer.

He would wait until the girls were dead. He would wait a month or year. Until Pharaoh was busy with other affairs. Until new guards had been

given new bribes. Until the gold he already possessed was not enough and he must have more.

He would empty the shaft. It would take several nights. He would remove rubble, cart it away, temporarily plaster over the cavity, open it up again the next night. Lifting the two slabs at the bottom would be easy, since the ropes still lay tied around them. He would step over the bodies, pleased that the girl of ivory had stripped off her gold and stacked it so neatly.

His wife would wear it. For Pankh would marry soon. His station required it. Possibly he would marry Renifer's little sister, thus keeping the secrets in the family.

In the darkness, Renifer inched away from the sleeping pale girl and went to her knees and prayed.

Sekhmet! Destroy Pankh who destroys queens. Destroy him who loves gold more than love. I beg thee, in honor of my willing sacrifice, with thy power, make him suffer.

Renifer sat back on her heels, hugging her knees to her chest. Never had she been so sure that a prayer had been heard.

She sat in terrible darkness, where not even gold had value, and dreamed of what Sekhmet would do to Pankh. And then began the terror. Not for Pankh, who deserved it! For Renifer herself.

Queen Hetepheres began to open her sarcophagus from the inside.

There was a creaking of bones as joints moved, and the sound of old dead laughter.

Renifer imagined the fingernails of a dead queen raking her face.

But Father had destroyed the mummy! There was no queen within that coffin.

The girl of ivory awoke and they gripped each other in the dreadful dark.

No longer did the sound seem to come from the sarcophagus. It was on all sides: above and below, left and right.

Was it the sound of a *ka* rejoining its mummy? But there was no mummy to find!

What rage would the *ka* exhibit when it learned the evil truth? It seemed to be trapped in the walls, fighting in the shaft, scrabbling on the surface.

What would it do to Renifer and the girl of ivory when it got into the room with them?

Renifer prayed aloud, desperate to reach the ears of the coming *ka*. “No,” she prayed. “O queen, I gave myself for you. I die for you. Do not attack me in the dark. O grandmother of Meresankh, whom I served, pity me!”

There were grunts and scrabbles. Scrapes and moans. A trickle, as of many pebbles; and a cry, as of pain.

I would rather have been impaled in the desert in the sun, thought Renifer. At least I could see and understand my death.

Beloved gods! Do not allow the fingers of the dead to feel the skin of my face.

PANKH

Pankh was permitted the honor of escorting Pharaoh back to the royal barge. The royal hand lay upon Pankh's forehead; the royal blessing bestowed upon Pen-Meru. But already Pharaoh's mind was elsewhere. His mother was safe and now He must get a good night's sleep.

Pankh did not consider Pharaoh a fool. The Lord of the Two Lands was as strong a king as Egypt had known. But He believed too much in His own people. He believed in loyalty.

It was Pankh's experience that men were more loyal to gold than to kings. A hundred men had gasped at the sight of that gold. Chains of gold, circles of gold, hanks of gold, crowns of gold—draped upon the girl of ivory, who neither bent nor sagged, but stood white and flawless, a statue of marble, carrying it into eternity.

Or ... as long as it took for tomb robbers to relieve her of the burden.

Pharaoh went to His chamber. The procession dispersed. Torches were doused. Priests went to their beds. Soldiers changed watch. Pen-Meru was rowed to Memphis, his arms full of treasure to replace his daughter.

Pankh, however, drifted toward the docks and piers. He knew the waterfront well. The dark was his friend. Half a mile upstream, he eased out into the desert. Silently and carefully, he circled the City of the Dead, keeping to the shadows, more uneasy about jackals than tomb police. He would approach the girls' tomb from the vacant western desert instead of the busy Nile.

Pankh would not be the only one who wanted that gold, but he was definitely the only one bold enough to take it the very same night Pharaoh dedicated it. In Pharaoh's own procession had been at least one tomb guard and one priest known to assist robbers. But did these men know there was a second shaft? That it had not been filled? Did they know the exact location? Or would it take them years of poking to locate the spot?

Pankh had purchased the architect's plans for the tomb of Princess Nitigret of Blessed Memory. But that did not mean the plans had been sold only once.

He must retrieve the gold before dawn. At the sun's first rays, the next police shift would arrive. Priests would be performing morning ablutions, tourists gawking, families picnicking. Acolytes would be anxiously reporting for their first day and vendors setting up their tables to sell cheap straw hats. The girl of ivory had worn so much gold! But if she could wear that much, he could carry or hide that much.

Pankh slipped among the minor pyramids to find the second shaft.

He regretted that the girls would not yet be dead.

In a way, he reasoned, it would be an act of generosity to speed them on their way. Less suffering. Yes, he was being kind.

ANNIE

Annie and Renifer were holding each other so tightly she could not tell whose heart was pounding so loudly: her own, Renifer's, or the intruder's.

It was the dark that was so very terrible. Although she had looked around carefully when there was still torchlight, and knew how small was the room in which they were trapped, higher than it was wide, now that it was utterly dark, she did not know. She could not bring herself to reach forth in the pitch black and touch a wall or a floor and the ceiling was far too high to be touched.

And then, through her fear, she became aware of something most odd. She felt a strong draft. There should not be fresh air in a sealed tomb, let alone a breeze.

Somehow, somewhere, an airway had been opened. Only the hand of man could move rocks and let in a draft. So ... the scrapes—could those be rocks as they were dragged away? The grunts—from a living man's chest? The rasping—soles of shoes sliding down stone?

Could this be *rescue*?

But who would rescue them?

She understood now that Pharaoh had ordered their deaths. His soldiers would not march back to retrieve the sacrifice. The priests had been proud to participate. In the faces of all assembled, Annie had seen reverence.

That left Pankh and Pen-Meru. Had Annie misjudged them? Were they good people after all? Helpless to act when surrounded by Pharaoh's finest soldiers? Had they returned, at hideous risk to themselves, to save Renifer?

If it is them, thought Annie, they'll save Renifer, but they won't save me. I'm the sacrifice. They'll leave me here.

The draft lifted her hair. Whoever was coming had opened a considerable airway.

And I'm climbing up it, she told herself. Pankh buried me alive; I have the right to smash him in the head.

She still wore the gold sandals. She slid one off and gripped it firmly in her hand. It was a good solid weapon. She'd knock him out in the dark and shinny out of her tomb.

There was a long scraping drag as stone was pulled over stone.

Trembling, the girls waited. Annie had lost any sense of direction in the little room and did not know where to look to find the shaft down which they had been lowered. But light, when she saw it at last, did not appear in the wall where the shaft had been. It was in the ceiling. A stone was being dragged away and slowly a slit was appearing. Fingers gripped the edge of the stone and shifted it more. Grunts and gasps followed. The fingers vanished, and returned gripping a torch.

Behind the murky smoke that swirled up to fresh air and life was a dark and half-seen face.

If Pankh can get down, I can get up, she said to herself. She had not a moment to waste. Lifting the magnificent sedan chair on which Queen Hetepheres had once rested, she hauled it onto the high bed and propped it against the headboard.

Above her, the torch was set on the edge of the hole. Pankh could not both hold the torch and lower himself. He sat on the edge of the hole above her and came down feet first. Annie tightened her grip on the sandal and climbed up onto the sedan chair. She was high enough to break Pankh's kneecaps, but not high enough to smash in his skull. Perhaps she should just break his fingers off.

Annie had never had impressive upper arm strength. She prayed adrenaline would give her enough kick so she could haul herself up into the hole.

The soiled shoelaces of Pankh's scratchy old leather boots had come undone.

I could grab him by the feet and yank him down, she thought. If I'm lucky, he'll break his spine on the floor.

She drew her arm back, preparing to whack him with all her might.

An inch of bright red sock showed at the top of the boots. The legs were encased in khaki trousers with frayed hems. She had not seen Pankh in anything but bare legs and a little white kilt.

The body lowered.

Annie held her sandal at the ready.

A waist appeared, and its belt. A shirt appeared, and its buttons. Elbows unfolded. Hanging from his fingers was Strat.

“Don’t hit me,” he said.

She could not speak. She could neither laugh nor cry. She could not even touch him, because with one hand she held her weapon and with the other was steadying herself against the wall.

“You’re beautiful,” he said to her.

She nodded. “Fit for a king,” she told him.

“I was there. I saw. It was Khufu, wasn’t it?”

“Who cares about him? Oh, Strat! How did you get here? Where did you come from! I was scared of death and pain and darkness and then there was all that noise and I thought you were a mummy coming out of the sarcophagus.”

“In 1899 when we open that sarcophagus,” said Strat, “there is no mummy. It’s something of a mystery. I can’t hang here much longer, Annie. It’s either let go or haul back up.”

“If you let go, you’re going to spike yourself on the bedstead. I’ll hop down from the sedan chair and move the furniture.”

It didn’t work that easily. She broke the arm of the chair by stepping wrong and fell backward onto the mattress. Strat kicked the sedan chair off the bed and fell onto the mattress with her.

She felt his face, every inch of it, to be sure this was her Strat, the one she remembered so vividly, the one she had wanted so very very much. He caught her long hair in his knotted fist and kissed her. “Oh, Annie. Of all the terrible things that happened, the worst was losing your lock of hair. All this time, I have cherished it. And this afternoon, my father threw it into the wind and it vanished in the desert.”

They clung to each other.

“You got away, then?” Annie said to him. “You escaped Dr. Wilmott and all the dangers that pursued you? I never knew. I could only guess and hope.”

“Oh, Annie, it was just so for me. Did you suffer after we parted? Did I behave wrongly? I have agonized over it,” he said. “It was a terrible decision, and so little time in which to make it. But I had to save Katie. You were strong and could survive. Katie was fragile and could not.” He kissed her cheeks and lips, her throat and hair.

Even now he cannot overstep the bounds of propriety, thought Annie.

How she loved him!

“I begged Time to let me see you again, Annie,” he said, feasting his eyes on her. The torch, still lying on the edge of the hole in the upper room, gave a faint shadowy glow to the room. “I climbed to the top of Khufu’s Pyramid to ask it, because the natives say that the ghosts of Time are present in the night.” He tightened his embrace.

In his time, a lady was not merely covered with undergarments of lace, silk and satin, but also strapped into corsets, so that the actual form and feel of the lady was unavailable to anybody, including the lady. Surely what his hands told him now of Annie Lockwood was beyond the bounds of propriety. He comforted himself that this was ancient Egypt, however, and for that, she was properly dressed.

“Not only did Time bring us together,” said Strat, “but amid such excitement.”

“If you call being buried alive excitement,” said Annie. “The two of us are supposed to suffocate to death down here. I think there’s a famous opera where that actually happens.”

“*Aida*,” said Strat. “In days gone by I often attended such musical torture.”

They held each other, their tears dampening their close cheeks.

“How did you know how to get down to us?” asked Annie. “I can’t stand feeling so confused.”

“I found a second shaft in real life,” he told her. “Well, 1899 life. Just this morning. Except forty-five hundred years from now, if I remember Khufu’s dates correctly. I paced it off exactly, and of course the same markers are here, because this came first. So Time flung me down on the sand, and I regained consciousness, and had the astounding privilege of seeing Pharaoh in a royal procession, and the shocking reality of seeing two human sacrifices, and just as the second sacrifice was lowered in her basket, I recognized her.”

Annie buried her face in his throat.

He said, "I'm not sure if you were sent to save me or if I was sent to save you. Had I stayed in my time, I would have been in terrible difficulties."

"Had you stayed in your time," said Annie, "I would have been dead. Was it you the other day in the museum? Did you buy me lunch?"

He was puzzled. "Lunch?" he said confusedly. "What museum?"

"I forgot. It hasn't happened yet. But I'm sure it's you."

She had the oddest sense of wanting to get back and check on him in the museum. First, we'd better get out of our tomb, she thought, sitting up abruptly.

"Tell me how it worked for you," he said, sitting up with her. He slid his hand under the mass of her silky hair and rubbed her spine.

"Your photographs," said Annie. "You had told me you were going to Egypt to be an archaeologist, do you remember? I never found out a single thing about what happened to you. You vanished. But I happened to pick up the Sunday *New York Times*, which my parents don't often buy and I almost never touch. And I felt you through the print. You were in a museum article. So I went to the museum to find you. I have only four days, which is the first problem. You see, my parents just got married, Strat. It was a lovely ceremony, and they're having a very short honeymoon so I thought we could have a very short reunion or ask Time to stretch it or bring you back with me or stay here with you."

Strat decided not to ask why her parents had just gotten married. It seemed late, what with their daughter in her teens. But who was he, whose father was on wife number four, to quibble about the marriages of parents? "The ceremony I just watched was also lovely," he teased. "You made a beautiful sacrifice."

"Thank you," said Annie. "I threw Pharaoh's gold on the floor over there. I think, but I'm not sure, that Renifer's actual father and her actual boyfriend handed her over to Pharaoh to be sacrificed. Those two men enjoyed every minute of shoving Renifer underground."

"I cannot accept such a statement," said Strat. "Her own father? Her own beloved? I expect they were so fearful of Pharaoh that they could not move to save their darling girl."

“Since when have you thought highly of fathers?” Annie demanded. “Your own father did the same thing to you. Or have you already forgotten being thrown down the shaft, so to speak, into the asylum?”

Strat did not like to think that the world—now, then or ever—had fathers who behaved that way. He liked to think of his own father as an unpleasant exception. He liked to think that when he became a father, he would be an excellent one. Under the circumstances, both 1899 and now, however, he did not actually expect to reach adulthood and have the privilege of being a father.

“Tell me everything,” said Annie. “Tell me about your life, and Devonny, and Harriett and Katie and what happened and where everybody is and all that.”

“First let’s get out of here,” said Strat. He got up off Queen Hetepheres’ bed and paced the tiny room. He smiled at Renifer, who was backed against the wall, holding her hand up to keep him away. “Don’t be afraid,” he said to her. “I came to save you both.”

Renifer just held both hands up like traffic signals.

“I don’t know how much time we have, Annie,” said Strat, suddenly worried. “Dawn will come soon. We have to get up out of here, but once we are out on the sand, we’ll be very visible. The soldiers won’t take kindly to finding Pharaoh’s sacrifices running around laughing.”

“How hard will it be to get out?” asked Annie, staring up at the hole.

“Easy. I had to remove some stones, which took me a while, but once the shaft was revealed, there’s a ladder. We just go up and we’re fifty feet or so from Hetepheres’ chapel. I’ll go first, and then reach down and help each of you up.”

Standing tiptoe on the bed frame, Strat was able to get his fingers around the stone rim of the ceiling hole. With the wonderful upper arm strength of boys, he hauled himself upward.

“I couldn’t do that in a thousand years,” said Annie.

“You don’t need to,” said Strat. “Hand Renifer up first.”

But Renifer would not go.

RENIFER

Renifer's heart was still beating, which she thought amazing, considering what she had been through.

The thing was male, she could tell from the voice and shape of it.

It was foreign, she could tell from the smell and clothing of it.

It was not a *ka*, because a ghost could pass through stone but this creature had needed an opening, as humans did.

Renifer had pretended that it would be Pankh, coming to prove his love. For a space of time so brief the words had hardly formed in her mind, she even asked Sekhmet to dismiss her prayer for revenge. But she had been right the first time. Pankh's love was gold, and he would come for that.

The rescuer, on the other hand, had not glanced at the treasure on the floor. It meant nothing to him. He cared about the girl. And the girl, whom Renifer had thought chained by the gold, had forgotten it also, swept away by the presence of the boy. Even now, begging, they were not thinking of gold, but of her.

They wanted to save her.

I cannot go, she said, without words, because neither of them could understand Egyptian, and because she did not think they could understand in any language. The Living God had decreed that she stay here and die. Yes, this was terror. She had felt great terror when she had stood above, and grasped what Pharaoh wanted of her. She felt greater terror in the hours of knowledge below the earth.

But now, Renifer could make the choice herself. Live or die?

Her family had betrayed Pharaoh in all ways. She, Renifer, could atone. She could die for Hetepheres.

She climbed on top of the sarcophagus, and lay down on her back, carefully adjusting her gown and folding her arms over her chest as neatly

as if she had been laid out by the priests. She stared silently upward at the un-painted ceiling.

The girl of ivory begged and plucked at her and the boy called from his hole in the ceiling. Arguments in a foreign language were presented. Tears were shed. For a while, it even seemed that the boy might come back down and they would try to force Renifer into the fresh air.

How many human sacrifices had to fight for the privilege of staying dead?

“Go,” said Renifer irritably. “Go!” She flicked her fingers at the girl as one might snap at a bug and hoped the girl would understand. Of course she did not, being a foreigner, and instead stamped her foot like Renifer’s little sister having a tantrum.

Renifer returned her gaze to the ceiling. She was faintly amused by what was happening. Hetepheres’ reburial had been arranged so speedily that none of the priests and courtiers on the barge and none of the soldiers at the shaft had paused to remember that an unused tomb probably had more than one open shaft. In a week or a year, some dedicated priest of Pharaoh would remember.

But would he do anything?

Renifer doubted it. Innocent men had already died because of Hetepheres’ tomb. Why be numbered among them?

A dedicated priest might even decide to check that second shaft and fill it in himself, to be sure the queen’s tomb could not be robbed yet again. But Renifer had recognized Pharaoh’s priest last night. It was the man who had held his ostrich fan in front of his face, fleeing the unfortunate event of Pen-Meru caught in the act of robbing Hetepheres’ tomb. No doubt that priest was very dedicated. To gold.

Which meant there had been at least three tomb robbers present at the reburial of Hetepheres: the priest, her father, her beloved. Poor Pharaoh, she thought. You do not know with whom You consort.

“Renifer!” said the girl of ivory fiercely, trying to drag her right off the sarcophagus.

Renifer made a universal sign: finger slicing her throat. Quit!

Muttering, the girl expended considerable effort replacing the queen’s sedan chair on top of the mattress. At first Renifer thought the girl was going to do a little tomb robbing after all, but then she understood the girl

wanted to be sure that Renifer could change her mind. If Renifer stood on top of that sedan chair, she might be close enough to the ceiling to pull herself through.

Coming back to the sarcophagus, the girl kissed her own fingertips and placed those fingertips on Renifer's forehead, drawing on her skin a sign Renifer did not recognize. A blessing, perhaps, or a salute. Renifer would never know. She did not let herself meet the girl's eyes. In a moment of weakness, she might surrender, cry out and go with them.

Pankh was weak. She, Renifer, would be strong.

She held her breath and all her muscle and bone against weakness and while she lay rigid and unyielding, the boy lifted his girl into the upper chamber. A treasure room empty, Renifer supposed, of anything except air.

Although, in its way, air was a treasure.

The boy did not slide the stone over the ceiling opening. She would lie here knowing she could leave, and that was difficult knowledge to possess. The flow of fresh air meant that she could not die easily in gathering sleep, and would die in the dreadful pain of thirst. But they were foreigners, and did not understand these things, and she had no means to explain.

She could tell by the sounds of their feet that a ladder remained in place inside the shaft; that he went first and she second up the shaft and from thence to freedom and life.

And then they were gone.

Renifer's tears puddled on the cold stone at her back. Then she prayed, composing a song for her own soul. How glorious and magnified was her voice in the stone chamber. She imagined her soprano rising like smoke, ascending to heaven, and knew that Pharaoh would be pleased.

She decided to die wearing Pharaoh's gold, so that when she passed into the next world, she could present that gold to Hetepheres and be acquitted of the evil deeds of her family.

She dressed slowly, finishing just as the torch the boy had left by the ceiling hole went out.

The weight of the gold was great. She feared falling over, getting disoriented in the dark or hurting herself. She wanted to die in dignity. So, keeping a grip on the edge of the sarcophagus to steady herself, Renifer knelt to pray once more.

She asked for one thing only.

That Hetepheres' tomb should not be robbed twice.

PANKH

Pankh pressed his back against a small obelisk, faced directly west and counted paces. He need only kick aside a few rocks, breaking the plaster that held them together, and shift a few large flat stones. According to the plans, these were not slabs requiring a team of men or ropes.

The torches on the causeway had been doused by the priests themselves to provide secrecy for the reburial of Hetepheres. Pankh felt his way through the gloom and shadows toward the entrance to the second shaft. He had almost finished the pace count when he saw on the ground a darker dark. A hole.

Somebody else had gotten to the second shaft before him. His hand flew to the hilt of his dagger. *That gold is mine*, he thought. *I will kill them!*

He was already making plans: better, perhaps, to shove the stones back over the hole, entrapping the robbers, and wait a few weeks, when both tomb robbers *and* girls would have died! Or perhaps he should just join the ongoing robbery. At least he would get some of the gold.

Although Pankh did not share well, and still meant to have it all.

But a hand stopped him.

Pankh whirled, ready to slash, and found himself facing two puzzled tomb police. If they were part of the robbery, they would have knifed him from behind. So they were simply doing their jobs, wondering who was wandering around in the dark, and why.

Luckily, he was wearing his best clothing and his finest jewelry. His uniform would give him some control. “Good evening,” he said, smiling, and guiding them away from the half-visible hole. “What good luck that you have appeared,” he told them. “Perhaps you would spend a moment or two to help me.”

He managed to draw them around the corner of an old mastaba, with flat roof and sloping sides. To face him, the police would have their backs to

the shaft opening. "I dropped an amulet of Sekhmet during Pharaoh's night ceremony, the one finished only an hour or two ago, in which I was honored to participate. I hoped to see my amulet still lying here."

Pankh sneered at amulets and religious symbols. When men or women hung such things about their necks, or built little shrines in their gardens, or more comical still, erected temples, Pankh laughed. Tomb robbers were atheists and knew what the common run of people did not. Nothing mattered except possessions.

"Why don't we wait for the sun to rise," said one policeman, "so we can see better?"

In the east, the sand had brightened. In a moment, dawn would explode over the desert. Surely Pankh was not too late to get the gold! "Let's go over to the causeway," he suggested, herding them. "I'm sure my precious amulet is lying on the stones."

"Then why were you coming from the desert?" asked one policeman pleasantly.

"The Lord of the Two Lands required a sacrifice to the jackals and to Anubis, jackal god of the dead, because of the urgency of Pharaoh's prayers and the need for celestial guidance."

The guards were unconvinced. He did manage to jostle them onto the causeway, however.

"Here it is!" exclaimed the other policeman, astonished. "Such a tiny ornament on such a vast surface! You are very lucky, sir." He stooped to retrieve an amulet which he first drew over his lips to obtain its blessing and then handed to Pankh.

It was a miniature Sekhmet, so perfectly carved it seemed the handwork of a god, not of man. Pankh had never owned such a thing, much less dropped it. Its slender chain was woven of tiny gold plackets, but the Sekhmet herself was made of a material he did not at first recognize.

He rubbed the tiny goddess between his thumb and forefinger. It was ivory.

From his palm, the little Sekhmet snarled at him. Under his heavy wig, Pankh's shaved scalp quivered.

Then he remembered he had no patience with religious superstition, and he put the necklace on. "I owe you," he said to the policeman. "I will see that you are well paid for your prompt assistance."

The necklace was surprisingly chilly against his skin. Nor did the heat of his body warm the slender chain. Although the chain was long and did not press up against his throat, he felt strangled by it, and he rubbed his windpipe, straining for air.

“Look there,” said the first guard softly. “What are those two doing?”

In the growing light, Pankh made out two people a hundred yards away, admiring the Pyramid. The man, dressed in the ludicrous trousers of northerners, vaulted onto the stone wall that enclosed the Pyramid, built to keep just such people from touching its sacred sides. Little boys had proved particularly annoying in this regard, scrambling over the wall and then with their bare toes trying to find cracks between the Pyramid slabs, so they could crawl upward. They fell and broke bones and their mothers sobbed.

“Tourists even at this hour,” said the second guard, shaking his head. “Amazing. And behaving badly, of course, since they’re foreigners.”

The foreigner stretched out his hand, that he might help his woman up onto the wall with him, and as she was drawing onto her toes, Pankh saw her white gown and long black hair, and recognized the girl of ivory.

Impossible.

But true. This foreigner had opened the second shaft. How could a foreigner have known the location? Who could the man be? Some crafty slave, perhaps, or escaped criminal. And what of Renifer? Where was she?

And who had the gold?

For had the girl of ivory still been clothed in gold, he would easily see it from here.

Giving their names to Pankh, so they could be rewarded, the policemen ambled off to deal with the tourists. Pankh had no more time to waste. Slipping around the mastaba, he strode up to the hole. Even in the few minutes that had gone by, there was enough light to see quite well. He descended the long ladder in two steps, crossed the empty treasure room and knelt beside the open trapdoor.

“I will have my gold!” he whispered. “I care for nothing but the gold!”

Pankh stroked the little Sekhmet as if beseeching her.

He forgot that there was one other thing he cared about.

Life.

STRAT AND ANNIE

The first rays of dawn glinted off Annie's dark hair. Her long white pleated gown lifted gently in the breeze. She seemed ancient and silvery. She could have been a goddess.

"I am starving to death," said Annie dramatically.

He looked at her with great affection. He had saved her from starving to death. Whatever else he had done wrong in his life—and Strat felt assaulted by all he had done wrong in his life—at least he had rescued Annie.

He said, "No one will ever excavate it, because archaeologists care only for kings, but I know where the workmen's village is from here. It takes hundreds of men to do all the stonework, the painting, the road building, the engineering, the cooking. Would a gold sandal be a fair exchange for a jug of water, a loaf of bread and a seat in the shade?"

Annie giggled. "Let's hold out for two jugs of water. Although I would really like an ice cream sundae with chocolate sauce."

He loved her instant recovery. She was not having the vapors, or in need of a rest cure, or weeping on his shoulder, the way girls would in his day. She was bouncing and eager for whatever came next.

He felt a ripping in his soul, as of tendons wrenched from bones because of a fall in a ball game.

What *would* come next?

He sat above her on the wall, Annie standing between his knees staring up at him, thinking his the most beautiful face she had ever seen. Of my precious four days, she thought, more than two are gone. Time is so stingy. "How I missed you," she said, "all these months. But you did the right thing when you saved Katie, Strat, and I have held your noble act in my heart as an example of how to live."

Annie imagined saying those words in 1999 to a boy in her high school. The situation would not come up, though, because boys in her class liked to be examples of how *not* to live. Noble conduct was not a goal in her century.

“Here comes trouble,” said Strat softly.

Guards were walking toward them, motioning at Strat to get down. But there was nothing scary about them. They were not armed and dangerous like her tomb escorts. They were just nice guys keeping people off tourist attractions. Annie smiled and waved.

Strat hopped down onto the pavement. “I don’t think they know you,” he murmured. “They probably weren’t part of the sacrifice ritual. They’ve lost interest now that I’m off their wall. Let’s find the workmen’s village and buy some food.”

Already the cool breezes were gone and the air parched. Huge numbers of people had arrived to take advantage of the short time before the blistering heat began.

Crews were getting to work on funerary chapels and memorial temples. Teams were erecting statues and walling in family cemeteries. Flowers were being delivered, and fine spices and incense being burned. Daughters were visiting their dead mothers and sons paying respect to their ancestors.

Where they had been alone only minutes ago, Annie and Strat were among hundreds now.

“I can hear a choir rehearsing somewhere,” she said. “This is so much more fun with you here. I really feel part of ancient Egypt. Of course, I almost *was* part of ancient Egypt. The dead part.”

“We are in the center of the City of the Dead,” he agreed.

“Thank you,” she said, “for keeping me in the city of the living instead,” and she began to cry. “Oh, Strat,” she whispered, “what should we do about Renifer? She didn’t choose the city of the living. Should Renifer have to obey our choice, and not be allowed her choice? Is she still a sacrifice or has she become a suicide?”

Strat looked around him. In the west, where the sands deepened into hills, just before the hills soared into cliffs hundreds of feet high, somewhere tucked among those hills was the workers’ village.

“I know,” said Annie. “At some point in the day when nobody’s around, we’ll go back down and offer her a second chance. I know I’d take it. I’d be sick of dying by then.”

Strat took a deep breath. “I think it would be better if we went right now and closed the shaft.”

“Strat! You can’t mean it!” How had she ever thought that Strat was noble of heart and generous in deed? “That’s horrible. Absolutely not! Leaving her there was bad enough. We’re not going to be the ones who seal her in!”

“People are going to walk by and find that open hole. They’ll explore. They’ll find Renifer. She won’t be dead because it takes days to starve. Then what? They drag her out? They hand her back to Pharaoh? Will she suffer an even more terrible fate because she circumvented Pharaoh’s plan?”

“What could be more terrible than being buried alive?” Annie demanded.

Strat pointed toward the edge of the desert. A hundred yards away, the mutilated corpses of dead men stuck up into the air on tall sharp spikes. Annie had seen that happen; she just hadn’t been willing to remember. There was, after all, something worse than running out of air.

“If we close up the shaft, we’ll actually be keeping Renifer safe,” said Strat. “When it’s dark tonight, and everyone else is gone, we pull away the stone and offer her a second chance.”

Annie’s heartbeat returned to normal. He was a gentleman after all; he had saved Katie; he would save Renifer. It was good.

“Too late,” said Strat sadly. “Look. The shaft is already surrounded.”

“I can’t see,” whispered Annie, starting to cry. “What’s happening?”

“I don’t dare get closer,” said Strat. “Quick, up that hill. We can see from there.”

They staggered across the sand, which was first hard and flat and then sinking and ankle-breaking, scrambled up a ragged hillside of sand and climbed rocks that collapsed under their weight. Some places were so steep they were forced to crawl.

“Be careful at the edges,” said Strat. “The wind chews on the undersides of these hills, leaving crags supported by nothing.”

The crest of the hill was wild and wonderful. Fingers of rock poked out into thin air. The peak of the Pyramid was half a mile away, but eye level. The necropolis stretched on and on. Thousands of distant tomb structures glittered like sugar cubes in the sun.

And where Renifer's open shaft might be, Annie had no idea.

"Let your eye travel down the causeway," said Strat, "and look for a dozen workers with baskets."

"Baskets?" said Annie blankly.

"Rock and sand," said Strat quietly. "That's how they filled in your shaft. Basket after basket. Rock after rock."

And there it was, a team lifting one basket after another from a series of donkey-drawn carts. Somebody somewhere had known about the second shaft.

Strat and Annie clung to each other. They could not, mercifully, hear the sound of the rocks as they dropped down.

But Renifer would.

Annie prayed to her own God that Renifer would not be scared. That she remained proud of her choice. That the end would come quickly for her.

Strat held her until she had stopped weeping.

The sun scorched the desert floor on four sides. He knew that the workmen's village was not far below, but the twists and turns of the jagged hill hid it entirely. Alone, they perched on a rock ledge.

"You're wearing only one sandal," said Strat.

"The other one fell off in the tomb," said Annie. "It's there with Renifer, I guess. I don't know how I managed to keep this one."

Strat took it in his hand. I also held this sandal in another life. Or stole it, depending on who tells the story. He remembered what he had to go back to.

When he set the sandal down, Annie's white dress blew over it, hiding it.

Beyond them, spread out like a painting in five stripes, lay Egypt. Two outside stripes of yellow desert. Narrow green stripes of farmland inside those. The placid brown ribbon of the Nile in the middle. "The river is a sort of vertical oasis, isn't it?" said Annie.

"You are my oasis," said Strat.

He was not sure just how much time he spent telling her that and showing her that. Long enough to know he wanted it to last forever, but long enough to know that time was passing. The heat of noon would be too much on this exposed spot. They must get out of the sun or die under it.

He pulled her even closer, to tell her what he thought they should do next, and Annie screamed.

PANKH

Pankh was amused.

The foreigners were in each other's arms, oblivious to the world, cooing. He had completely surprised them.

He knew how impressive he looked. Of course, foreigners were always deeply impressed by Egyptians. His white kilt was starched and finely pleated, unlike their sweat-stained garb. His wig was heavy and flawlessly braided, unlike the messy sandy locks of the foreigners. But most important, his dagger was heavy and strong in his hand.

The girl, pleasingly, had screamed.

She would scream more before he was done.

Hetepheres' tomb had been empty. He had spat down the trapdoor, trying to spit on the queen's sarcophagus, but missed.

These were the possibilities: The foreign male had carried the gold in some basket or bundle that Pankh had not seen; or the man had buried it to retrieve later; or somebody else had the gold.

Pen-Meru? Could he have moved so swiftly?

But it was unlikely that Pen-Meru would trust a foreign male. And although Pankh could possibly imagine Pen-Meru saving Renifer, why would anybody save the girl of ivory?

Pankh had climbed out of the tomb, retreated behind the mastaba, dusted himself off and straightened his wig. He was preparing a lie should he encounter the same tomb police when Pharaoh's crew arrived to fill in the shaft.

So Pharaoh had known of the second shaft; known its precise location and that it was empty. But his men had certainly not known that the stone would be moved away and the shaft gaping open, down to where the living sacrifice probably still lived. Pankh laughed grimly to himself as they swore oaths not to tell Pharaoh. His retreat was covered by the racket of

rocks they threw down as quickly as they could, to keep the spirit of the sacrifice from reaching out toward their bare feet and cursing their lives.

And there, beyond, were the two foreigners, on the edge of the desert, climbing the cliff. Nobody went toward the desert, where there was no water, no shelter and no hope. People went toward the Nile. Had there been time already to bury the gold up on that cliff? Were they carrying it with them? Or did they expect to meet others with the gold at that spot?

Pankh would get the gold before he threw them off the cliff. No need to worry about bodies. Tomb police didn't bother with this piece of sand. Jackals did.

But now, standing before them, Pankh felt the rage of frustration working through his chest. They had no gold with them. But they certainly knew where it was; the girl had removed it and placed it somewhere. "Gold," said Pankh clearly. He drew bracelets around his arms and a necklace around his throat and raised his eyebrows.

The foreign boy and girl were puzzled.

"Gold!" he shouted, hating them for not understanding a civilized language. "Where is the gold?"

Their eyes flew open and their jaws dropped. They stared as if seeing somebody rise from the dead.

"The gold," he spat. "Where is the gold?"

"I have the gold," said Renifer, behind him.

Pankh whirled.

Renifer stood on the very edge of the cliff. She was so weighted down with that beautiful gold he did not know how she could possibly have scrambled up here. Behind her was nothing but air.

Pankh recovered quickly. "How beautiful you are, my beloved," he whispered. "How wonderful that you survived Pharaoh's evil trick. How glad I am to see you in the land of the living."

Renifer said nothing. He could not see her breathe or blink. She did not look as if she belonged to the land of the living. Her face was as expressionless as if she had died.

Pankh had his back to the foreign man. He was vulnerable. And yet, he felt in some way that the danger came from Renifer herself. "Come, my beloved. You will hide in my house, lest Pharaoh learn that you survived. But what pleasure we will have in being together, you and I."

Renifer said nothing.

Pankh took a few steps away, hoping Renifer would step toward him. The rims of this kind of cliff frequently caved in, and her weight was putting her in danger. Although of course he could simply retrieve the gold from her corpse. “Renifer, it wasn’t my fault. I didn’t intend for Pharaoh to sacrifice you. Who could have dreamed that such an idea would enter the mind of a civilized Egyptian? Come to me, my beloved.”

Renifer said nothing.

She had not an inch between herself and falling. He extended his hand. But she seemed not to see it. “Your father and I were forced to agree with Pharaoh. My beloved, let us leave these strangers to their own devices. Let us go home and rejoice that you live.”

She was still and unearthly in her gold. How *had* she gotten up the steep and difficult slope? Had she been lifted? By what power?

The thin chain of the amulet of Sekhmet seemed to cut his neck.

By now some laborer or priest or guard would have noticed this strange scene playing out on the distant hill. Somebody would investigate. Pankh could not permit Renifer to delay any longer. They would be out of time. “Renifer, come let your beloved Pankh embrace you.”

Renifer removed one arm piece. Its gold was over an inch thick. He could not take his eyes off it. Underhanded, she threw the bracelet. The heavy circle sailed in a great arc out beyond the cliff and then vanished in a long curving silent fall.

The sand below was soft. The heavy gold would dig its own hole, the sand would close over it and Pankh would never find it. “No, no, my beloved!” protested Pankh. “You and I will need that gold in our marriage. Think what it will cost to protect you for all time from the wrath of Pharaoh.”

Renifer threw a second bracelet into the air.

“Beloved,” he said coaxingly, inching toward her.

She almost smiled. She almost softened. She was almost his. When she held out her arms, Pankh acted swiftly, grabbing for those gold-laden wrists, but Renifer leaned back over the cliff edge, planning to fall, still willing to die for Pharaoh.

Pankh’s velocity was great. He could not stop himself. Together they would hurtle over the cliff and hundreds of feet down to their deaths. He

tried to brace himself against her; let her fall while he saved himself.

But the arm of the foreign male, in its loathsome jacket of heavy cloth, pulled Renifer to safety while Pankh spun out into the air and was lost.

The amulet flew up in Pankh's face, and the last thing he saw before death was the image of Sekhmet, goddess of revenge.

RENIFER

Renifer stood within the embrace of the foreign male.

She did not need to follow their language to know what they were asking. Fascinated, amazed, they were crying—how did you get here? how did you know? are you all right? we're so glad to see you!

Had the gods sent these strangers to save Renifer—or had she been sent to save them? “I was kneeling beside the sarcophagus while I prayed,” she explained, as if they had been given Egyptian along with life. “Pankh looked into the tomb. He did not see me. He had eyes only for gold and thought the tomb empty. He swore, yet again defiling Hetepheres. He damned her for not making her gold available to him. He spat, promising to kill you, O girl of ivory.”

The girl had been entrusted to Renifer's care. Handed to Renifer, as it were, in the midst of Pharaoh's papyrus swamp. Renifer could not let Pankh kill the girl of ivory. She had almost literally been on Pankh's heels as he ascended the ladder out of Hetepheres' tomb, too busy muttering to himself and uttering threats to look back. When Pankh hid behind a mastaba, she walked behind a chapel, and then Pharaoh's crew arrived.

For a few moments, she stared at them, as they filled in forever the shaft out of which she had just escaped. She heard their oaths to say nothing to Pharaoh and understood their terror.

Heavy lay the gold on her body. She followed Pankh as he chased the girl of ivory and the foreign male. There was a perfectly fine path up the cliff, but the foreigners and Pankh hadn't seen it, so they struggled up the worst and most crumbling side. Renifer walked slowly along the path. The workers in the village saw her—a goddess, as it were, clothed in gold, going back to her home in the cliffs, and they fell on their faces in the sand and let her pass.

Beyond the Pyramids, the Nile sparkled under the sun. Renifer could see the city of Memphis, her beloved and beautiful home. She could see, from here, the entire world.

And many of its inhabitants, running in her direction.

Pankh had not cried out, but witnesses had. Tourists and guides, vendors of carved wooden hippos or hot spicy sausages—all had shouted to the tomb police that somebody had fallen. A crowd was gathering at the foot of the cliff, exclaiming over Pankh's body. He was an officer of Pharaoh, wearing his uniform. There was no hope of explaining these extraordinary events.

Foreigners would be held responsible.

Nobody would believe any version of Pankh's death except the worst: that he had been pushed to his death by the foreign male. Renifer could see all too clearly what was going to happen now. The boy, who had come to save the girl of ivory and who had just now saved Renifer herself, would be accused of murder, and pay the ultimate price.

The crowd began pointing and shouting, and Renifer knew what they were shouting for. The foreign male.

The girl of ivory turned even more pale, if that were possible, and she and the boy exchanged frightened looks. They had reason to be frightened.

"Go into the desert," said Renifer, pointing at the massive hills in the west. The Nile was truly cupped in a valley, and the sides of the cup were high and brutal. No civilized person went west of the Nile.

"Sekhmet saved me," she said quietly, "and you who protected me will be given protection. Be not afraid. I will prevent the mob from reaching you."

Even now, the boy worried more about Renifer than himself. He wanted her to come too.

She shook her head. "Go, and go swiftly," she said, giving him a gentle push in the right direction.

Coming out of the west, borne on a high wind, was a cloud of sand. It stood up vertically, like an approaching god. The boy and girl walked toward it, while the girl of ivory called farewell, waving, and repeating her accented version of Renifer's name.

How powerful were the gods. Sekhmet had answered every one of Renifer's prayers: Hetepheres' tomb would not be robbed twice, the queen

was avenged and Pankh had suffered.

The terror and joy of dying for Pharaoh disappeared. Renifer was astonished and glad to be alive.

She followed the path back down, arriving at the bottom exactly when the soldiers did. They froze at the sight of her.

Renifer extended her long slender arms and stood under the blazing sun, all gold and white, all shimmer and ghost. She sang the chants of the dead, her soprano rising and shivering, curling around the tops of temples as she walked. She flung her head back and addressed the sky and the hidden stars. She called upon Hetepheres to be with her, and Sekhmet to avenge her. She called upon jackals and queens, upon crocodiles and princesses.

Long before she finished her song, the tourists had scurried back to the temples and the guards had fled to the safety of their headquarters. Tomb robbers they would fight. Ghosts and *kas* would be left to their own devices.

Renifer lowered her arms. They trembled from the weight of the gold.

The tall thin windstorm spread and deepened, until it sailed like a ship over the desert. It flung sand over the half-carved Sphinx, hiding an entire paw. It flung sand over tourists too foolish to shelter in a mausoleum. It smothered the pots of flowers and put out the fires of incense.

Renifer ignored the sand. It would wrap her forever or let her go. She walked on, accepting the will of her gods.

STRAT

Strat had known they would not die in the tomb of Hetepheres, because when it was uncovered in 1899, it contained no bones. But out here, in the vicious true desert, the one that reached all the way to the Atlantic Ocean, here they could die. No one would know, either. Not in Khufu's time, not in Strat's and not in Annie's.

The footing was terrible.

From a great distance, he had been able to make out tiny paths twisting up those towering cliffs, probably followed by wild goats and greedy robbers. Up close, there were a hundred possible ledges or routes, and no way to tell which actually went somewhere. But in his heart, Strat knew that nothing out here went somewhere. They were headed toward nothing. No town, no oasis, no road, no water.

The sandstorm was no longer a single column. It now covered an entire width of desert. Like a blustery sheet of sand or a hurricane all in a row, its hope was to fill lungs, blind eyes, deafen ears, bury bones.

They came to a bluff, and had to scramble up it, but their feet sank. They circled it, tripping and stumbling on rocks and rubble. They plunged once more into sand; sand; sand. The wind hurled sand into Annie's eyes, and she cried out, and clung to Strat, wiping at her eyes with her free hand. "It will kill us," she shouted. "We have to go back!"

But they had nothing to go back to. When Strat turned, even the Pyramid of Pharaoh had been obliterated. "Tuck your face beneath my shirt, Annie," he ordered her, "and we will grip each other tightly and hope not to be torn apart by the strength of the wind."

They would be buried where they stood. For a moment he bowed his head over Annie's grit-filled black hair and accepted his defeat. But only for a moment. "No!" he shouted. "I will not be beaten again!"

Strat recognized this shred of his father in him: the refusal to admit defeat. Well, then he had one good thing from Hiram Stratton, Sr., and he would take it.

“Annie,” he commanded, “step through Time.”

The pain in his heart was so fierce he could not tell whether it was dying of sorrow or of sand. “You go first, Annie. I cannot live a second time in fear that I abandoned you or that you suffered without me. Go. Quickly.”

But just as Renifer had refused to leave her tomb, so Annie refused to leave hers. “No, Strat. I love you. Now when Time has finally brought us together, you think I’m leaving? Forget it! Whatever happens, it will happen to both of us.”

“Annie, all that can happen to us is death. We have no water, we have no transportation, you don’t even have shoes. We cannot live here, only die here. We must cross through Time again.”

“But Time won’t let us go together and I want to be together. When this storm ends, we’ll steal a camel,” said Annie. “We’ll be our own little wagon train to Morocco. Then we’ll build a boat and row across the Atlantic to New York. Although there won’t be much around in Manhattan, forty-five hundred years ago.” She giggled.

“Stop playing games,” said Strat, although this was why he adored her. She could always laugh. Perhaps it was her century; a time when girls seemed to have so much more than the girls in his time. “Anyway, there are no camels in ancient Egypt. If you want to steal a camel, you have to come to 1899 with me.”

He expected to hear one of her peculiar words, from the vocabulary of her amazing decade: Okay or Deal.

But Annie’s hair swirled across his face in a black cloud, her eyes opened wide, and screaming, she filtered away from him. It was as quick as the death of Pankh. She was in his arms and then his arms were empty.

Strat tried to follow her, stumbling through the sand, falling over rocks, tumbling off the cliff they had so desperately climbed. He felt himself surrounded by all the troops of Pharaoh, reaching and grasping, and then in the sand, he was alone again, retching and gasping. He eluded them, neither dying nor living, just staggering on, calling her name.

Annie.

And eventually, he was defeated. Sand filled his shirt and hair, his shoes and the hem of his trousers. His determination not to be beaten had been beaten.

Many things were stronger than one man's heart.

VII



The Sands of Time

RENIFER

She walked along the edge of the straight-sided canal, wakened a sleeping sailor and ordered him to take her to Memphis. The sandstorm tore his sails and he had to row. Memphis was closed up tight, every shutter and door sealed against the storm. She walked alone through her city.

Sand piled up against the mud-brick walls that enclosed every garden and home. Sand ripped the leaves from the sycamores and tore down the nests of birds. When she reached her own door, she knocked for a long time before the doorkeeper let her in.

Her father, Pen-Meru, was standing in the garden, mournfully surveying the damage from the sandstorm.

Up on the roof, no sand had fallen. On its pedestal still stood the gold statue of Sekhmet. "Greetings, Father, from the *ka* of Hetepheres," said Renifer.

He whirled.

He saw her, goddess and *ka*, cloaked in gold. He who had buried her fell to his knees.

She found it quite pleasing to stand above him. "The queen sent me home. The queen requires you, Father, to treat me as *her* daughter, instead of your own."

Pen-Meru beat his forehead against the dirt and she let this go on for some time. "Enough. The queen requires you to cease stealing. She has, after all, an empty tomb in which to store your living body, should you disobey."

"I obey," whispered Pen-Meru.

Renifer walked into the women's rooms. She would worry about Pharaoh another day. Today she would see her mother, take a hot bath, throw the dreadful gold into a pile by the bed. And maybe she would spend

it one day, and maybe she would not. And maybe she would marry one day, and maybe not.

She would not worry. The gods held her in the palm of their hands.

STRAT

He was buried only up to his ankles, and he shook that sand away, and was aware of raw skin, burning eyes and the terrific heat that rose up to slap him now that the wind had passed. Beyond him stood three Pyramids. One Sphinx. A dozen tents.

Eternity, however desirable, was not here.

Strat was a prisoner of Time. His own.

There was no sign of Annie Lockwood. Instead, he was facing the same group he had left, thousands of years, or only an hour, ago. There stood the girl reporter, his father's hireling, Miss Matthews. How tall she was, her straight spine so unusual. Most females had terrible posture, being desperate to stand lower than their men. The only other girl he knew who was proud of her backbone was Annie herself.

I will never wed, thought Strat. I will never say vows of perpetual love. I will never look for a girl to equal Annie. For there is none.

Dr. Lightner said in an odd voice, "Strat. How can you be holding that gold sandal?"

Strat brushed sand from his eyebrows and hair and tried to focus on the world in which he was about to be beaten once more. I've just convicted myself, he thought ruefully, staring down at the gold in his hand. I would rather have her lock of hair. This gold sandal is not Annie. And if I learned one thing in the sands of Time, it is that gold has no value. Only decency toward others is to be valued.

"I myself opened the tomb," said Dr. Lightner. "There was but one sandal, Strat, and I hold that in my hand. Where did you find that other one?"

Strat was aware of his father's bulk on his left. The shifting confused figures of the other members of the dig on his right. The flapping of tents

and the whisk of brooms, the smack of shovels. There had been a sandstorm. The crew was digging them out.

How could I have let go of Annie, he thought, sunk in misery, and kept my grip on a worthless piece of metal? "It was lying in the rubble," said Strat finally, "up in the hills."

Water was brought, and Strat drank gratefully. Sweet cool water. Now that was treasure.

People spoke of the damage from the sandstorm and of its wondrous works, flinging up from its hidden depths the very partner of the sandal Dr. Lightner had found in a tomb. Strat could not quite hear. The winds of Time spun through his ears and thoughts and made him deaf.

He became aware that his father was speaking, almost courteously. His father seemed to be apologizing. Strat stared at his parent.

"I have judged you wrongly," said Hiram Stratton, Sr. "You are not a thief."

Around them, in this necropolis, more generations of fathers and sons were on display than anywhere on earth. Here had a thousand generations loved and hated. And what was Strat's destiny? To love or to hate?

"I wish you to come home with me," said Hiram Stratton, Sr., "and be my son."

"You said that once before, Father," said Strat softly. "When you snatched me from school and put me in an insane asylum."

"I was wrong," said his father.

Neither Strat nor any other person had ever heard those words from the mouth of Hiram Stratton, Sr. Strat was touched beyond measure that his father would make such an effort, such an admission. Could it be? he thought. Could my father and I be at peace? Could that be the gift of Time?

Not Annie, but my father? My family? Those I want so badly to love and cannot?

CAMINA

Camilla Matthews was looking at Hiram Stratton, Sr. She was looking at evil.

Good people, because they are good, want to believe in good. She saw Strat wanting to believe that his father was good. Leaning into the hope that his father cared for him after all. Would welcome him home. Would love him.

How the world was driven by love. This was a desperate love; a son's love.

Hiram Stratton was gloating, revenge within his reach. Camilla understood because she, too, was a friend of revenge. This was a man who excelled at cheating and pretending and convincing all around him to believe his untruths.

Camilla said softly, "Strat, there is a place for you in the British war. Go south. Vanish again. Use a different name. Carry on in a different life." She took his hand and turned him and gave him a slight shove toward the south.

Far away, as if somebody at that very moment were painting her on a gold background, Camilla could almost make out a shadowy girl in a white gown. "Go, Strat," said Camilla softly and insistently. "Go, and I will give you time."

Strat stared into Camilla's eyes. "*You were sent by Time?*"

"Go," she said, and he went.

Hiram Stratton, Sr., opened his huge maw to bellow after his son.

Camilla caught the sleeve of the man's jacket. He weighed far more than she, but she was taller and her touch startled him, and he paused.

"It is not your son, at this moment, who matters, Mr. Stratton."

The great man looked at her with annoyance and shook himself loose.

“I am the daughter of Michael Mateusz, whose death you gladly caused when you burned your factory. I stand here, Hiram Stratton, to accuse you of murder.”

STRAT

Strat ran after Annie. “We’ll go to the Sudan!” he shouted over the sand. “The British are having a wonderful war! I’ll get another camera. We’ll sell your gold sandal and have enough to live on for a while. We’ll sail up the Nile and catch the army and I’ll be a famous photographer! Annie! Wait!”

He struggled on and on in the sand. He could not seem to reach her. He told himself he would catch up. “We’ll get married,” he said. “It would be unseemly to travel together otherwise. I know that I am but nineteen, Annie, and I have no means of properly supporting you. But I have faith in my wits and my abilities!”

He was exhausted. His voice did not carry the way he wanted it to. He was not getting closer to her. “Be my wife, Annie! We shall find a missionary on the banks of the Nile! Or in South Africa! Or on board some fine ship!”

He and Annie would repeat their vows in the presence of God and this company, whoever the company might be. Strat was not picky. He had known the worst of companies. Annie was always eager for adventure. She was no shrinking violet, like the girls in his time.

But like a violet, Annie shrank. He could see her and he could not.

His voice—or perhaps it was hers—cried out, “It isn’t fair!”

He lunged forward, sure he could take her hand. But Annie whirled like some dervish of ancient Egypt, spinning and diminishing and vanishing. No! thought Strat. We’re going to honeymoon in a far land and make a home as homes are meant to be: children and hope and joy and love.

He could see the Nile in the distance, a dark and shining ribbon, like the ribbons of Annie’s hair, and he ran on and on, sure he could reach them both.

ANNIE

“No!” screamed Annie Lockwood. “It isn’t fair! I came all the way through Time for you, Strat, and you—”

Her voice had no sound and her lungs no air. She wanted to beat her fists upon the chest of Time. This isn’t fair! You brought me all this way! I deserve Strat!

How many times had Annie or her classmates shouted that? It isn’t fair! In nursery school, when other kids got pushed on the swings and your turn never came. In third grade, when other kids got to sit next to their best friend, but you had to sit with a creep. In sixth, when other kids got to go to Disneyland for vacation, but you just grilled hotdogs in the backyard. In ninth grade, when you paid some attention to the world, and found that some citizens were treated a lot better than other citizens.

It isn’t fair!

But by then, enough things had not been fair that you could shrug. Life isn’t fair, you said to one another. But this is me, thought Annie. I should be an exception.

Time, like all the great powers, like gravity or velocity, continued on. It did not acknowledge what happened inside or outside its span. Annie fell, hair in her face, all sweat and tangles, desperate for a drink of water. The thirst of the desert had taken all moisture out of her. She could not open her eyes in the tremendous glare.

Slowly the rushing shriek of wind and Time left her ears. She tried to listen to the sounds around her, to separate speech from noise, but she was too battered by Time and loss. She tried to see where she was, but the immensity of sun blinded her, and she could make out only stones and mirages of water and palm. She wavered in her heart, as if she were nothing but heat on sand, a figment, impossible to catch up to, impossible to be.

It didn't really matter where or when Annie was, because she was not quite where or when. She was among but had not arrived.

She knew that Egypt did not care. Egypt had seen too much. From Alexander the Great consulting the oracle out in the western sands to the invasion by Napoleon. From Antony romancing Cleopatra on the deck of a Roman ship to the canal at Suez. From the ancient scribe who chiseled a decree of Ptolemy V on a slab of black basalt to Champollion who translated the Rosetta Stone, two thousand years later.

I don't care one little twitch about history! thought Annie. I want Strat. It isn't fair.

She had never felt quite so American or quite so spoiled brat, but she did not want to set an example. At last she stood up and stumbled over stones and steps toward a drinking fountain. The water was cold and refreshing and she drank as if she had not had a sip of water in a thousand years. She felt as if she had not showered in a thousand years either. She tottered back to the seat she had left.

I love you. I want to marry you. We'll have children and joy and hope and love.

Had she said that? Or had Strat? Or were the words a dream?

I love you. I want to marry you. We'll have children and joy and hope and love. Couldn't have been me saying that, thought Annie dully. In my time, the most a girl ever says is, "You wanna go to a movie?" and the most a boy ever says is, "Yeah, okay, if I got nothin' else to do."

"The museum is closing," said a bored voice.

Annie looked up, jarred. For a moment, she almost recognized the man; his ancient dark features; somebody's father, somebody's murderer—he was—no. He was only a guard, sweeping through the museum at closing. And she, Annie, was only a tourist, not even a New Yorker.

She was just a silly girl in silly clothing, wearing silly hopes.

"Oh, Strat," she said, heart bursting with grief.

And across the room—not a room, really, but a vast, glass-ceilinged case; a case large enough to hold an entire ancient temple and an entire reflecting pool and three entire classes of middle school children on a field trip—across that room, somebody heard.

"Annie?" said Strat.

CAMINA

The unfounded accusations of a girl had no effect.

Hiram Stratton, Sr., merely explained who and what she was, a paid lackey of his own, a piece of chicanery whose ticket he had paid for.

The silly and very rude words of Miss Matthews embarrassed the company. The French were appalled, as always, by the manners of American females. The Germans were amused by so dramatic a woman, built to sing opera, to stand by the Rhine and bellow songs across the water.

Hiram Stratton, Sr., shoved the girl aside and demanded of all of them—servant and scholar, expert and passerby, “Find my son. Now.”

The Americans returned to the dig and the tourists got bored. The Egyptians melted away and the British remembered that they were en route to war.

Camilla went to her tent to pack. What would become of her now? Her dream of becoming a great reporter had been silly to start with, but now she had proved herself a liar and a fake, and nobody needed a reporter with those vices. Her tears soaked into the clothing she was folding.

She had not avenged her father.

She had not done anything, really.

She no longer knew what she had been thinking of—telling Strat to run off into the desert. It was true that great heat caused a lady to hallucinate.

Well, she could do one thing: sail to Spain and talk to Katie, who knew right from wrong, action from apathy and hope from sorrow.

“Miss Matthews?” called Dr. Lightner through the flimsy tent walls. “Might we speak?”

She wiped away her tears. Men were undone by ladies’ weeping and that was not fair. Oh, the scorn Dr. Lightner would face, having been tricked by

a mere girl. "Of course, sir. Please come in. I am packing. I shall not abuse your hospitality another hour."

He entered, stooping of course, because neither he nor she could stand upright in the tents. He pulled up a stool and sat beside her. "You should have told me. I would not have exchanged a syllable with the man had I known that he truly is a beast and a murderer."

"You believe me?"

"Of course I believe you. You have not forgotten the life and death of your father, nor should you. How proud your father would be, Miss Matthews. Such courage! To become a famous reporter and cross half the world!"

She faced him squarely. "But you know that isn't true. I am not Camilla Matthews, age thirty and a seasoned reporter. I am Camilla Mateusz and I am seventeen." She lifted her chin and told him every detail, those he had heard already in front of witnesses and those she had lacked the courage to state.

When she finished the true narrative of her life, he was staring aghast. She awaited his contempt. But no, he was shouting with laughter. Kissing her!

"Forgive me," he said. "I was forward. I deeply apologize. But oh, Miss Matthews! I thought you a queen all along. In my thoughts, I compared you to the queens of ancient Egypt. Partly, that was your fine height and straight spine, your carriage and manner. Although of course," he corrected himself, "the real queens of ancient Egypt, whose mummies I myself have examined, were short and bent. Yet I was correct. You are as royalty. What zest! What courage! Camilla, how proud I am that you trust me with the truth."

She had to laugh. "I have no royal blood, sir. I am the daughter of Polish immigrants. And I have no idea what is to become of me except that I must leave."

"Leave? Do not think of such a thing! Might I have the honor of asking you to become Camilla Lightner?" he said. His words tumbled over one another in his excitement. "We will live in Cairo. I will support your family. I promise, no matter how badly I need donations, to accept none from Hiram Stratton. If necessary, I will become a professor of history in some obscure American college attended by dull and unworthy students. I

will do anything to support you properly and not compromise your high standards.”

He was a good man.

Was it possible that she could be a good woman?

She thought of Katie, and thought she could hear Katie laughing, saying, of course you can. Goodness is a decision. Make it now.

“Yes,” said Camilla.

“What children we will have!” cried Archibald Lightner, kissing her once more. “How brave and strong they will be!”

“And tall,” said Camilla.

ANNIE

The person coming toward her ... was he the boy from lunch? Or could it possibly be Strat from another century? He looked like Strat and he didn't. He wore cargo pants and a navy sweater. Strat in Egypt had worn khaki trousers with frayed hems, red socks inside scratched old boots.

The boy worked his way through a crowd of departing kids, dodging their swinging backpacks. "Here you are!" he said, laughing. "I've been looking and looking for you. I don't know how we got separated. Did you finish the special exhibition without me?"

"Hurry it up, kids," said the guard. "Take a left out that door, please."

They took a left out that door and walked like strangers away from the Egyptian Room. So, Time, what are you up to? Annie wanted to know. Flinging me from century to century? Giving me an hour here and a minute there? And who is this? And why isn't his identity clear?

"I'm taking a train home," she said to the boy. "I'm walking to the station. It's a long way on foot, but a beautiful part of the city." She framed her next sentence the way Strat would have. "Might I have the pleasure of your company?"

"I love how you said that. Now I feel like an usher at a wedding." He put out his arm for her to take. They walked down an aisle strewn with sculpture instead of wedding guests. "This has been the weirdest day," he confided. "I was trying to find you, since I didn't want to lose my new Lockwood on the very day we met, and I guess I dozed off in the Egyptian Room. I dreamed I was on the Nile, sailing upstream with a bunch of British soldiers. We didn't have enough to eat and the tribes were attacking from both banks and what I did have was a camera. On a tripod, isn't that a kick? I lost it in a swamp. There was a crocodile."

Annie was trembling. She swallowed hard and asked the important thing. "Was there a girl with you? Did she catch up? Did you have

company?”

But he was frowning at his watch, lifting his wrist and tapping on the watch face. “It isn’t working,” he said, completely distracted by not knowing the time.

I don’t know Time very well, either, thought Annie. “Don’t worry about the watch,” she told him. “All it is is Time. We’re going to have enough.”

He smiled at her. “I love how you said that, too. I love people who are sure of things.” He took the watch off and squinted at it to see what was wrong.

Then they were outdoors, the wide magnificent museum steps stretching down to the street. “Two at a time,” he told her, and in the lamplit night, they vaulted down the wide steps two at a time until they reached the sidewalk below.

It was a beautiful evening. The air was crisp but not cold. New York glittered with early Christmas lights and hundreds of people moved swiftly to their unknown destinations. The whole world seemed eager to get home in time.

The boy balled up his watch and aimed for a trash barrel.

“Don’t throw your watch out,” cried Annie.

“It’s a really cheap one. I shouldn’t have expected it to last. You can’t get this kind of watch fixed, you can only get another.”

“May I keep it for a souvenir?” said Annie quickly, and blushed at his stare. “After all, I don’t meet extra Lockwoods all the time.”

He laughed and gave her the watch. “I’ve noticed,” he said as they walked, “that just about every sentence we’ve said has the word time in it.” He said, “Are you warm enough without gloves?” He took her hand in his. “Listen,” he said, “speaking of time, what are you doing next Saturday?”

Who cares about other times and other worlds when you can dream about next weekend? thought Annie. The best time is always now. “I’m free,” said Annie Lockwood to Lockwood Stratton.

She put the broken watch on her own wrist because she had seen right away why the watch didn’t work.

It was full of sand.

FACTS

The Metropolitan Museum of Art did have an exhibition in November 1999 presenting the tomb artifacts of Hetepheres, mother of Khufu, who built the Great Pyramid. It was a mysterious tomb. Her sarcophagus, although sealed in antiquity, contained no mummy. The tomb, small as a closet, contained much less than a queen should have. George Reisner, who excavated that tomb in real life in 1925, guessed that it was a hurried reburial, possibly after a botched robbery.

The tomb entrance was found during the Reisner dig when the cameraman's tripod broke some plaster.

That did not happen, however, in 1899, and the cameraman was not Strat.

No Hiram Stratton, Sr., or Hiram Stratton, Jr., existed or made donations to the museum.

About the Author

Caroline B. Cooney is the author of the following books for young people: *The Lost Songs*; *Three Black Swans*; *They Never Came Back*; *If the Witness Lied*; *Diamonds in the Shadow*; *A Friend at Midnight*; *Hit the Road*; *Code Orange*; *The Girl Who Invented Romance*; *Family Reunion*; *Goddess of Yesterday* (an ALA-ALSC Notable Children's Book); *The Ransom of Mercy Carter*; *Tune In Anytime*; *Burning Up*; *The Face on the Milk Carton* (an IRA-CBC Children's Choice) and its companions, *Whatever Happened to Janie?* and *The Voice on the Radio* (each of them an ALA-YALSA Best Book for Young Adults), *What Janie Found*, *What Janie Saw* (an ebook original short story), and *Janie Face to Face*; *What Child Is This?* (an ALA-YALSA Best Book for Young Adults); *Driver's Ed* (an ALA-YALSA Best Book for Young Adults and a *Booklist* Editors' Choice); *Among Friends*; *Twenty Pageants Later*; and the Time Travel Quartet: *Both Sides of Time*, *Out of Time*, *Prisoner of Time*, and *For All Time*, which are also available as *The Time Travelers*, Volumes I and II.

Caroline B. Cooney lives in South Carolina.